# Weaving Stories: Family Narratives in an Irish Context

By

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# Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This qualitative analysis sets out to explore family narratives in an Irish context. The study explores which aspects of spending time together are most significant for families. Special emphasis is placed on listening to the voices of children in the family which adds to the multiple voices that families portray. The main aim of this study is to discover children's and parents' experiences of family life in modern Ireland with specific regard to the time, space and activities shared together. In addition the study sets out to investigate how the business of modern living impacts on the time families spend together. Furthermore, it aims to determine whether certain rituals and routines are unique to each family or shared with other families. A sample of twelve families was interviewed; forty five participants including both children and adults. The conceptual framework informing this research draws on the child's relationship to the world as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) known as the bioecological model. This model contextualises the exploration of multiple voices within the research. Participant families were interviewed within their family contexts in the naturalistic setting of their homes. Family interviews were conducted as a unit, subsequently allowing the researcher uncover the co-construction of narrative and allowing for the children's accounts to be of equal importance to the adults. Multiple voices emerged from the explorations which contribute significantly to the enhancement of knowledge about how family processes emerge and are sustained. This joint story telling within each of the families demonstrates the co-construction of family narratives as an important part of the culture of each family. Findings from the study support the often universal nature of experiences of family lives. The study contributes significantly to theoretical debates on family lives and informs methodological knowledge relating to the study of family life in Ireland.

# Declaration

I hereby declare that this work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree or any other qualification. I further state that this work is not currently submitted in consideration for any degree or any other qualification. This thesis is the result of my own investigations. Where references have been made to the work of others, this has been acknowledged in the text and a bibliography is appended.

Signed_____ (Candidate)

Date_____

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Introduction

This chapter will outline the research question, the aims and objectives of the study and provide a rationale for conducting the research. It will highlight the unique contributions that this thesis contributes to the subject area. The rationale behind the study and my reasons for conducting this research will be explained. A context for the changing nature of families in Ireland including a historical portrait of the Irish family will be outlined in order to provide a background to the topic. Lastly, the structure of the thesis will be described.

## Main Research Question

The main aim of this study is to explore with families their stories of everyday life in modern Ireland with specific regard to what kind of time, space and activities families share together and how this links to the family's identity. Inherent in this is the need to explore with children, parents and families what modern Irish families look like – from the inside and in particular to explore how the business of modern living is impacting on the time a family has to spend together. The study will examine experiences of daily routines, rituals and commutes, from school runs to mealtimes in family homes, to night time routines where children and parents experience the impact of busy life schedules in an effort to spend time together. The research will examine how family identity is understood and maintained by the family members and whether and how the family routines and rituals cement this identity. Another key objective is to gather children's subjective experiences of modern Irish family life within the context of their family, and to explore how children use their home and play spaces. These explorations and emergent themes of time spent together in families will be useful in socio political debates concerning the rights of children and work life balance debates in Irish social and working society. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the analysis of family routines and rituals could be adapted into a checklist to be used as a measure of family well-being and stability within social care settings.

This study of families in a contemporary Irish context will make a direct contribution to the development of research, knowledge and practice in interviewing children in a manner where ethical issues and practice implications of researching children's experiences are of central concern. Furthermore the study will offer a unique insight into how families manage and cope with the various stressors and joys of modern living. It seeks to understand what is important to family members including the children when they have an opportunity to experience 'simultaneous free time' Daly (2007), something that can be quite rare in our hectic modern lives. Family forms have changed enormously in the last decade or so in Ireland with changes in the patterns of migration both inward and out ward and a rise in cohabitation and lone parenting. Divorce and subsequent remarriage or cohabitation have created the rise of the blended family (Fahey and Lunn 2012). However family is still defined by the members in it rather than the official name recorded on the population census. Family has a distinct *quality* and it is the particular essence of home and family that is central to this study. 'Families are the most powerful influences on children's lives', (Good Childhood Enquiry 2009). The majority of people are raised in a family, arguably a major influence on the rest of our lives (Pronovost 1989) whether we conceptualise 'family' as an experience, a process or an institution it continually constructs a meaning that is part of our everyday world view (Daly 2007).

Twelve families were interviewed in total, each family together as a group to discuss aspects of their joint experience. This research sought to recruit participant families from diverse backgrounds and with a variety of different family structures, in rural and urban Munster and Leinster. The research acknowledged and actively incorporated the cultural diversity that is present in the areas where the research was carried out. On the basis of the research aims and objectives outlined above, qualitative research methods were considered to be the best way to access the accounts given by families. This choice of methodological approach will be justified within chapter four.

## Rationale behind the study

The significance and impetus for conducting family research in Ireland in post Celtic Tiger years is hinged on three important considerations as follows:

**Firstly-** This research acknowledges the central role of the family in the research process. Interviewing the family as a unit is comparatively uncommon, there is relatively little literature published on the subject. Family members have been interviewed in previous research, (Maunther et al 2000; Wright 2003), although, methodologically this has consisted of one family member at a time rather than together. Further research has been carried out with families using a variety of methods, using observation as a method for the children and structured and semi structured interviews for the parents (Gabb 2008, 2004; *Growing up in Ireland Study* 2011). However, my research focuses on the family as a group, whether a Mum, Dad and two children or a single parent and child/children. The interview situation of all the family together could be considered to be similar in practice to a focus group. But it is not a focus group as the family members are in a relationship with one another so there is a very different dynamic within the interview situation. As a researcher the skill of family interviewing is crucial and central to all of the research objectives outlined previously. During the interview, the families are in a conversational circle, and narrative exploration and analysis of these conversations creates immense knowledge that allows us to see the complexities of human lives as they are shaped by changing family and cultural practices. My study explored the co-construction of meanings between the family members in conversation; building up layers of the narrative, which is later analysed.

**Secondly,** within this study children are regarded as competent social actors able to reflect on their lives in a family, their accounts are considered as equal in value to the adults' accounts. This concept of equality in children's participation is echoed in recent Irish research involving children (Greene and Hogan 2005) and (*Growing Up in Ireland Survey* 2009, 2011). Current literature and research involving children has begun a dialogue on the value of engaging children in and reflecting on their own experiences and actions, helping them, their families and the practitioners around them to develop a unique insight into their world (Leeson 2007). Irish social policy and legal systems have become concerned with children's rights in recent years, most

notably children's rights to be recognised as people. This recognition of the rights of children has resulted in a growing awareness of the importance of giving a voice to children on matters affecting them. The inclusion of children in research, notably as subjects rather than objects, underpins recent developments in children's rights. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), The National Children's Strategy (2000), together with the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (2005) and the Children's Ombudsman (2004) have all underpinned this endeavour to give children a voice in their own right. This movement towards including children's voices in policy and legal provision has created a new demand to create methods to facilitate children's narratives. However, the manner of engaging with, listening to and making sense of children's views is somewhat challenging. While the study of 'the child' has traditionally been the domain of psychology, sociology has over the past two decades rediscovered childhood (Christensen and James 2008; Corsaro 2005; Wyness 2006) Yet traditionally, research conducted on and with children has seen a predominant emphasis on children as the objects of research rather than children as the subjects; on child-related outcomes rather than child-related processes; and on child variables rather than children as people (Dunn and Hughes 1998; Hogan et al 1999; Liu 1999; Christensen et al., 2000; Greene and Hill 2005). This study highlights children's voices and considers their view of the world alongside their parents.

**Thirdly**, children and parents have been interviewed within their family contexts in the naturalistic setting of the home, in order to privilege the lived realities of everyday life.  It is expected that this research will provide very valuable insight by showing the family narratives embedded in the lived moments of everyday, their negotiation of time and of spatial boundaries and the meanings created between them. Furthermore the conceptual framework of this research will draw on the child's relationship to the world as outlined by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) which complements the epistemological backdrop of social constructionism (Gergen 1985). In summary this study makes a significant contribution to theoretical and methodological knowledge pertaining to the experiences of children within families.

# Contributions to knowledge in this research

It is anticipated that this research will make a contribution to new knowledge in a number of key areas both methodologically and theoretically.

**1.** Methodologically, this study makes a unique contribution to the narrative study of family stories in Ireland. Interviewing the entire family group as a discrete unit, allows for a conversational circle to occur between the family members. That is to say that each member of the family can participate in a free flow of conversation interrupting another person or adding a comment to another person's response, rather like a natural conversation. Meanings are contested and negotiated between family members facilitating the building up of many layers of understanding about particular subjects and experiences. In order to facilitate this methodological focus it was essential that the families were made to feel at ease from the outset which led to the decision to conduct the interviews in the naturalistic setting of the home.

**2.** Another unique contribution that this research makes is an exploration of children's narratives, examining their understanding of their family routines, rituals and domestic space use. This provides a unique insight into the experiences of children in a contemporary Irish context. Importantly, in this research the children's stories were embedded within the conversational circle of their family. As has been stated earlier children's viewpoints were explored by using a methodology that facilitated contributions from children, allowing them to fully participate in the interviews by putting them at ease and establishing as much rapport as possible prior to the start of the interview. In addition, the practice of agreeing that the children could move about during the interview process was vital to the successful implementation of this interview practice. Ensuring that the children could engage the researcher by walking through the spaces in their home as they were discussing their stories facilitated the children in owning their stories of family.

A theoretical contribution that this research makes centres on the concept of children's supported agency within their narratives. In the context of this study children are considered as competent social agents (Greene and Hogan 2005; Corsaro 2005). However, although this agency was a key underlying premise of the research, in reality children are situated within their family contexts and rely upon their parents for support (Bronfenbrenner 1979). During the family interviews

children were facilitated to express themselves freely, however, very frequently their parents prompted and scaffolded their responses particularly at the outset of the narrative (Vygotsky 1978). So, in essence children were afforded agency in the research process but still needed the scaffolding presence of a parent. I term this concept, *'scaffolded agency'*. As the children relaxed into the family interview they generally needed decreasing levels of support from the parent or older sibling, often becoming very comfortable, chatty and confident in finding their own voice in the family story.

**3.** This study links Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model to family routines, rituals and family spaces. It illustrates how family narratives about routines, rituals and space use are socially embedded within wide networks in society. In addition that family routines, rituals and space use at home change and evolve over time.

## My personal interest in this study

Ever since I was a child I have been interested in family stories. I was the storyteller in my family; perhaps this was because I was the eldest of four children and often had to look after my younger siblings. I would always tell stories to pass the time, which my brothers and sister still recount as adults many decades later. I think that stories often reveal a great deal more than just the surface topic. They frequently illuminate a world beneath the story, a patterning of allegiances and relationships between individuals within the family. Stories are often told for a reason and to a particular audience, or just as a way of amusing or entertaining others during a long journey. The telling of a tale serves as a device to connect and reconnect with others who shared the experience. It helps to consolidate memories for children as they grow in their family and provides a foundation to make sense of new experiences in the light of previous situations. Stories, therefore, have a grounding effect on the developing person. For people of all ages stories serve to bind people with a common thread that is 'their' story.

I also have a fascination with family dynamics and especially how these impact upon children's lives both now and in later life. Parents and children live in families and

the value that society puts on parenting can affect the quality of life for adults and children in modern Ireland. I believe this value is very significant for the safe guarding of families in the future. I am a mother of five children, although four of my children have since grown to adulthood and left home to pursue their studies and careers. In raising my own family alongside work and study I am very aware of the time constraints and demands that are placed on modern families, mothers and fathers and children. It is a challenge at times to fit everything in seamlessly and enjoy time together as a family. Because of these personal experiences, I am very interested in how families today negotiate their use of time in a fast paced modern world. I am very interested in new families; when a new baby comes into the family, it is a very exciting time. I was a volunteer counsellor in two parenting organisations in Ireland for sixteen years, and in this time I saw that new families sometimes struggled to manage time together and get the best out of each day. My role lay in supporting new families to deal with issues and expectations of having a new baby and its impact on siblings and relationships within the family. I learned an incredible amount from the families whom I came into contact with over that time. Similarly, I have worked as a volunteer in youth groups, where I found that being sensitive and listening to and including the childrens' and adolescents' viewpoints is vital too for cooperation and respect within families and society in general. I feel that this study I have undertaken so far and the research work I have been engaged in has chimed very well with my own philosophy on family life and led me to this research project which seems to encompass all my interests and values. I feel that it has been a privilege to be involved with this research. The families I have interviewed have been totally fascinating and all perform family incredibly differently, each one unique but yet with some familiar themes, like mealtime routines, bedtime stories, favourite activities, and stories of commuting. I am very deeply and personally committed to sharing more stories from the participant families in future publications.

## Contextual background of families in Ireland

In order to contextualise the world of the modern families in Ireland this section will outline a picture of Irish family life dating back through the last few decades up to the present time. Irish family life in the last century has had a unique demographic

picture, late age at marriage followed by large families, and high rates of bachelorhood and spinsterhood. Levels of separation remained fairly low. Irish family types have undergone massive change since the birth of the Irish state in 1937, some of the key changes will be outlined below. Family patterns in Ireland are somewhat unique still, according to Gray (2012) quoted in the Irish Times newspaper, 'Irish family patterns are distinctive from those of some other western countries in two respects: the birth rate remains relatively high and the propensity for marriages to dissolve remains comparatively low'. This chapter also considers to what extent families have changed in recent decades and whether there a new perspective on families within social research.

**Changing demographic of families in Ireland**

Family forms in Ireland have changed dramatically in the last few decades. From the traditional Irish family of the past to the nuclear family, modern Irish families are greatly different in their size and make-up. The (2011) census results show that overall there were 1.17 million families, up 12 per cent on five years earlier. The marital family still accounts for the majority – 70 per cent – of all family units, or just over 870,000 families (Central Statistics Office 2011). Families today are much more diverse, from married couples with children, to co-habiting couples with children, to lone parents who are single and lone parents through separation and divorce (McKeown et al 2003; Fahey and Lunn 2012). There is a growing trend for couples to marry later than ten or twenty years ago and many couples now co-habit before marrying. Frequently, children are born before the couple marries and so the pathways to parenthood have changed (McKeown et al 2003; Central Statistics Office 2012). The number of cohabiting couples has been rising rapidly in recent years. While cohabiting couples are still one of the fastest-growing family units – up 18 per cent – the pace of growth has slowed. They now account for 143,600 family units. Most cohabitants – 58 per cent – did not have any children, but the average number of children in this family type is increasing, up to 0.7 children per cohabiting couple from 0.6 in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2012).

Marriage in general is on the increase according to Census (2011); the statistics show an increase of 144,000 more married couples in Ireland than there were in 2006. Furthermore, according to the Central Statistics Office (2012), the bulk of these

marriages – 132,000 – represented couples marrying for the first time. It is interesting to note however that the remaining 11,000 marriages were to couples remarrying after the break-up of a previous marriage. However there is an increase in the numbers of divorced or separated individuals, the figures for divorced people has risen by 150 per cent in the last decade to a total of 86,000, the number of separated people stands at 116,000. These figures mean that 10 per cent of those who have ever been married have now separated or divorced.

Non Irish Nationals are more likely to be married at a younger age and less likely to co-habit especially couples from the Muslim Community (Fahey and Field 2008). The most dramatic rise in family units is among same-sex couples. Although the figures are relatively modest with just over 4,000 same-sex couples recorded as living together, it represents a rise of almost 100 per cent. Of these families, 230 were recorded as having children. Many families now are smaller with the average household comprising of 2.4 people per household (Central Statistics Office 2007). At the birth of the Irish State in 1937, large families were commonplace, even in 1965, there were 9,000 families eligible to receive children's allowance for eight or more children, and by 1995 this figure had dropped to just 974. First children tend to be born later than two decades ago; the average age of first time motherhood in 1980 was, within marriage, 29.2 years and 22. 2 years outside of marriage, this figure has risen to 33 years within marriage and 27.7 years outside marriage in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2007). In more recent years children are born outside of marriage, 31 per cent of all births registered in the state in 2007 were to single mothers, up from less than 5 per cent in the 1980's (Central Statistics Office 2007). In 2011 the average number of children per family was 1.38 (Central Statistics Office 2012), down from 1.41 in 2006. This was a less pronounced drop than observed between 1991 and 2006.

Fig 1 below shows the difference in Irish Families between the 2006 and 2011 Census (Source: Central Statistics Office 2012)

| Population 16 - 64 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Census | Single | Married | First Marriage | Separated | Divorced | Widowed |
| 2006 | 47.33% | 45.80% | 44.62% | 3.38% | 1.90% | 1.59% |
| 2011 | 46.50% | 46.17% | 44.78% | 3.33% | 2.58% | 1.42% |

Figure 1

Since the 1996 Family Law (Divorce) Act many adults and children live in separated families this impacts on families in many ways, for example there is an additional financial burden of running two homes and separated parents have to work to negotiate access children and to organise childcare spread over two households (Kennedy 2001). Divorce has increased dramatically in the State in the last decade, the number of divorced persons increased from 35,000 to 59,500 between 2002 and 2006, a rise of 70 per cent. The number of separated people (including divorced) increased from 133,800 in 2002 to 166,800 in 2006 (Central Statistics Office 2007). However, Ireland still has the lowest divorce rate in the European Union (Central Statistics Office 2007).

**Fertility in Ireland**

Families are a key site of reproduction (Bernardes 1997; McKie and Callan 2012). Ireland has the highest fertility rate in the European Union at 2.05 lives births per woman in 2011, whilst the European average fertility rate is 1.57 live births per woman (Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2013). In the developed world the fertility rate needs to remain at 2.10 live births per woman in order to keep the population stable assuming there is no inward or outward migration (Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2013). So, although Ireland's fertility rate is high amongst European Union Member States, it is only barely high enough to maintain the population level in the country. The age at which women give birth in Ireland has risen in the last few years and in addition more women are delaying childbirth until later in life according to the Central Statistics Office (2012). For example, mothers in their 30s gave birth to 460,000 children in 2006, but by 2011, this figure had risen 11 per cent to almost 511,000 (Central Statistics Office 2012).

A major influence on family change in Ireland is the economy (Keohane and Kuhling 2004; Inglis 2008). The Irish economy has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, moving from being a relatively weak economy in the 1980's to the 'Celtic Tiger' in the 1990's and on to a serious recession from 2009 onwards (Inglis 2008). This has impacted on families and on population figures within the country. Extensive outward emigration has been replaced by inward migration although it seems to be slowing down according to O'Connor (2008) there is currently a return to outward emigration especially for young graduates seeking employment. In conjunction with the aforementioned demographic changes, Ireland is a more culturally diverse nation than before, particularly with the influx of people from Eastern Europe as a consequence of the enlargement of the European Union in 2006, with over a quarter of a million migrants from the Eastern European countries moving to Ireland to find employment (Inglis 2008). On census night 2011 544,357 non-Irish nationals were resident in Ireland, representing 199 different nationalities (Central Statistics Office 2012).

Arguably, Ireland has become a more 'cosmopolitan society', for families to live in. There is much greater diversity in the population with the presence of so many people from other countries, leading families to have increased contact with other cultures, traditions and cuisines. As a nation the population seems to be more conscious of health and well-being, there is a growth in gym memberships and many families spend their leisure time visiting farmers markets, conscious of sourcing the best food for the family (Keohane and Kuhling 2004; McWilliams 2005; Inglis 2008). Of course this is only possible if a family has the finances to support this 'lifestyle' - many families do not (McKeown et al 2003).

**Origins of the traditional Irish family**

A look at the meaning of 'the family' over the last 100 years or so may help to put modern families in context. This subsection takes a social historical narrative approach to explore some of the change in families, with particular reference to Irish families.

As a social researcher, I wanted to reflect on the past and yet be reflexive in the present specifically as some of the topics I covered with the families related to traditions and rituals within their own families which were perhaps passed on from their parents or grandparents. In understanding family change we have to consider that there have been two distinct perspectives in studying the family in the last century in Ireland. Firstly, the Irish family has been studied through the lens of culture and anthropology in work such as that of Arensberg and Kimball (1940) with their ethnographic study on Irish family life in Co. Clare. Secondly, Irish family life was explored through an economic and political lens (Kennedy 2001). Both of these perspectives recognise the Irish family as a unique institution; the Irish statistically were exceptional with late marriage high fertility and very high levels of bachelor and spinsterhood (Coleman 1992, Fahey and Fitzgerald 1997; Guinnane 1997; Kennedy 2001). In the census of 1940, 45 per cent of adults never married (Hannan 2012).

Most families depended on agriculture and families predominantly were 'stem families' that is to say that the family was passed on only to one child, usually the eldest son. The eldest son after inheriting the farm could marry and can bring his wife to live on the farm, the other sons could stay on the farm and work unpaid for their brother but they could not marry, therefore, in the next generation there is only one stem that is allowed to develop (Gibbon and Curtin 1978). When the daughters marry they leave the family farm. This situation of single child stem inheritance is summed up aptly by Hannan (2012) referring to Whelan (1986:160) 'One for the farm and the rest for the road'. It is undeniable that family forms in Ireland have changed greatly in the last few decades leading to much debate in the media in Ireland and prompting some commentators to adopt an approach of being pessimistic or optimistic about changes in family life (Silva and Smart 1999; McKie and Callan 2012). Further discussion on the study of the family will be made in the next chapter, but in the interim, it is important to follow below with a proposed lay out of the thesis.

## Structure of thesis

The thesis is structured in the following way;

*Chapter one,* this chapter introduces the thesis, outlining the aims and objectives of the research and the rationale for conducting the research, also the contribution to knowledge that thesis will provide. It provides a historical and contextual background to the family. Lastly it outlines the structure of the thesis.

*Chapter two* will be the first of two literature review chapters. The chapter will provide a contextual background to the Irish family. It will consider the changing nature of family structure, briefly tracing the history of the Irish family, work patterns and societal changes that have influenced the family in recent decades.  In addition, this chapter will address the changing nature of the conceptualisation of childhood, introducing some of the key debates in understanding of childhood.

*Chapter three* outlines key theories and relevant literature relating to the time that families spend together and the places where this time is spent. Research into family routines, rituals and space use will be considered. This chapter draws on the disciplines of Psychology, Sociology and Cultural Geography.

*Chapter four* is the methodology chapter and introduces the ontological and epistemological basis for this research. The thesis takes a relativist position with regard to ontology and a social constructionist perspective as its epistemology. This assumes that realities are relative and our worlds are socially constructed by individuals. In addition, the chapter will set out the conceptual tool which is used to frame the findings of the research, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory. The method by which the data was gathered was in -depth interviews with families and this is outlined in the chapter. The key aspect of these interviews was that the families were interviewed as a family group rather than singly. Twelve families were interviewed, from September 2009 to February 2010 in the East and South East of Ireland; demographic details of the families are included in this chapter. The methods of analysis are discussed next in the chapter; Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 9 was used as a first step of analysis to in order broadly code the family interviews. Secondly thematic narrative analysis based on the work of Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993a; 2008) was used

on a portion of the data to analyse in depth the co-construction of narrative within the family interviews. Ethics will be discussed in this chapter, in particular the ethics of interviewing children. Lastly, personal reflexivity in the research process is outlined as this is a key tenet of the research philosophy.

*Chapter five* summarises the emergent themes from the interviews after they were coded using NVivo 9. It presents the findings in brief summaries and also visually. Three dominant themes that were pertinent to the overall research aims were selected at this stage of analysis to be analysed in greater depth using thematic narrative analysis. The themes were; family routines, family rituals and family space use.

*Chapter six*, family routines, is the first of three analysis and discussion chapters that looks at the dominant themes emerging from the data from the family interviews. The family narratives are carefully thematically analysed as per Kohler Riessman (1993a, 2008). This method was chosen in order to uncover the complex layers of conversation between the members of the family. The chapter focuses on the theme of family routines and what these mean to the family members. Several sub themes are analysed and discussed such as mealtime routines, bedtime routines, school routines, technology and routines, and housework routines. This chapter highlights how family routines are very complex, and frequently unique to each family while sharing common features with other families. Family routines are demanding but vital in order to structure work life balance for many busy families caught between competing demands of work and school and parenting duties. This chapter argues that family routines are embedded within wider social networks of support (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

*Chapter seven,* family rituals, this chapter focuses on the analysis and discussion of family ritual.  Rituals are defined as special times that families spend together and also on practices that contain particular symbolic meaning for the individuals in the family. Some family rituals overlap with the families' religious faith; however, some are secular such as birthday or anniversary celebrations. This chapter analysed the subthemes of family ritual such as Christmas, birthdays, rites of passage such as communion and confirmation and lastly rituals with a particular focus for children, that of Halloween. The chapter argues that children as well as their parents can

articulate their views on family rituals in a very compelling manner, uncovering the importance of shared memory making for members of the family.

*Chapter eight*, family spaces this last analysis and discussion chapter presents an analysis of the data from the family interviews pertaining to the theme of domestic space use. This chapter has subthemes of technology and space use, negotiation of personal space within the home, spaces as demarcated by gender and spaces of play and imagination. The stance that this thesis takes is that space is not just physical but psychological also.

*Chapter nine*, the concluding chapter, highlights the key finding of the thesis and explores the interrelationship between family routine, family rituals and domestic space use in the families in the study. In particular it presents the unique contributions to knowledge that this study has provided both methodologically and theoretically. Additionally the chapter highlights the potential implications that this research can add to practice in the area of family support. This chapter also sets out the limitations to this research and lastly ends with a number of suggestions for future research.

# Chapter 2 Families and children

## Introduction

> The concept of the family is accepted by all cultures and disciplines and across time. Families are the oldest and most important and enduring form of social grouping, and most of us, at every stage of our lives, think of ourselves as part of one or more families.
>
> (McKie and Callan 2012:190).

Most people world-wide consider living in a family to be the most important aspect of their lives (Bernardes 1997). However it can be challenging to study family life because we are so close to the topic, we all come to the research area with our own values and beliefs on the subject. This chapter will examine a number of areas related to the study of families.

The chapter is divided into two sections, the first section outlines the literature pertaining to family life. Families are challenging to define and this aspect will be considered at the outset. There will be a focus on how there are new conceptions of what constitutes a family emerging from the literature on family life. The chapter also considers how families have been studied within the social sciences, how new theories of family life have emerged in recent years. There is a move away from regarding the family as a key institution in social life to a desire to explore the micro-worlds of family practices. There has been considerable change in patterns of family formation in Ireland in recent years as was outlined in chapter one. In order to contextualise this change in family life a brief history of the family in an Irish context will be traced to provide a basis for the appreciation of family change in Ireland. The Catholic Church in Ireland has arguably influenced family practices relating to marriage, divorce and fertility and these influences will also be discussed.

The second half of the chapter reviews the literature on the changing nature of childhood to the new conceptions of children within families. This second section of the chapter will also sketch the history of childhood in a general context and also

from an Irish perspective, this is pertinent to understanding how it happens that we have certain specific childhoods (Mayall 2010).

## Defining families

Despite a relatively taken for granted assumption that 'no two families are the same', there is still a belief that there exists a distinct entity called 'the family', according to Bernardes (1997). Clarification and clear definition of what 'family' means is necessary given that there are many definitions of family and family types within the social sciences (Giddens 1991; Daly 2007). The United Nations (1998:48) offers the following definition,

> 'A family nucleus is defined in the narrow sense of two or more persons within a private or institutional household who are related as husband and wife, as cohabiting partners, or as parent and child. Thus a family comprises a couple without children or a couple with one or more children or a lone parent with one or more children'

> (United Nations, 1998:48)

Families can be conceptualised as being a key institution and a social group in society and are often defined by disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and politics. Newman and Grauerholz (2002:7) offer this definition of families, stressing that families contain relationships,

> 'Sociologically speaking, families contain not only individuals but relationships: husbands-wife, parent-child, sister, brother, and so on. These relationships imply connections, bonds, attachments, and obligations *among people*, which is a key characteristic of any type of social group'

However, Newman and Grauerholz (2002) state that families differ from other groups, as the involvement is at a deeper level and the family group contains a much greater diversity of activities and routine practices that are carried out together as compared to other social groups. According to McKie and Callan (2012) families worldwide are demarcated by some common characteristics. Families are defined by a common identity that is shared over time. Family members identify with each other through shared memories of times spent together. Although, this identification may wax and wane over time at different points in the life-course, nonetheless it is still very significant for most people. Families can also be defined economically, for

example by the common ownership of a dwelling, business or land. Economic co-operation is fundamental to most family units. There is an intergenerational link with most families where the older generation in the family may leave a legacy in order to benefit their children and grandchildren (Kennedy 2001). Reproduction of the next generation is central to the family unit; families usually greet the birth of a child with great joy and anticipation, it is often the focus of much celebration. The key motivation in this context is on raising the next generation and there is an enormous investment in time and other resources to secure the future of the child or children. Wider family are often required to support the parent(s) who are carrying out the role of child rearing (Bernardes 1997). However some couples may choose not to have children and households may become childless after the children have grown up and left home. As individuals have certain basic needs, like food and shelter, families are a site of care work and domestic labour. This care work is often demarcated among gender lines, with women and girls doing the majority of this kind of work (Hochschild 1989). When there is a crisis, like a serious illness, or bereavement, the interdependence of families becomes apparent, with family offering practical and financial support (McKie and Callan 2012). Co-residency is another key characteristic of most families. Living together in the household is an indicator of family membership. Sharing the space of home allows for multiple interactions and opportunities for communication and support within families (Douglas 1991). Common identities frequently arise out of a sense of shared connection to a place, such as the family home. Further shared characteristics of families can include memories forged through a shared history, as well as family traditions or even family secrets (McKie and Callan 2012). Common values and norms distinguish families also, having a shared understanding of what behaviour and attitudes are acceptable within that particular family, for example such as acceptance of divorce or how alcohol consumption is viewed (Bernardes 1997).

In an Irish context, the concept of what constitutes family has changed dramatically since the inception of the Irish State, therefore an exploration of the concept of family in Ireland is relevant to this discussion. Many families in Ireland at the start of the 21st Century are declining in size. The number of children per family is gradually reducing, in 1991 the average family size was 2.0, in 1996 it was 1.6, and in 2006 it had fallen to 1.4. The latest figures from the Census of Population 2011

indicates that the average family size now stands at just below 1.4 children per family (Central Statistics Office 2012). For the purpose of census 2011, a family is defined as a couple with one or more children or a lone parent with one or more children (Central Statistics Office 2012).

The terms 'Household' and 'Family' are frequently treated as equivalent to each other in official documents in Ireland and also in everyday use. In the Irish Language version of the 1937 Constitution, the family is called 'an Teaglach' and the home similarly is called 'an teaglach'. Thus the two concepts become synonymous with each other in the language (Kennedy 2001). This leads us to a consideration of the changing structure and meaning of families in Ireland in the past.

**The 'Traditional' Family**

Rather than the nuclear family model of today, that of mother, father and two or three children living together in a small unit, historically the family was a cornerstone of social stability. This stability was premised on the fact that the family provided many social functions in the community. It was a site for work, charity, social care, reproduction, discipline and employment (Hareven 1993). Wealthy households could help sustain an entire community, helping maintain social order. Homes could contain not just immediate family members but also extended family, lodgers, servants, and mentally ill adults were placed with families by local authorities. Families had the flexibility to extend themselves to accommodate other kin at crucial points in the life cycle, for example grandchildren, or infirmed elderly relatives. (Coleman 1992; Hareven 1993). Women were considered to be dependent on their husbands and men headed the household and were masters of the family. Children lacked rights compared to today and only recently have laws been enacted that protected children's human rights, e.g. in relation to working hours. There was a high mortality rate for babies and children and it was not uncommon for families to lose one or more children to illness (Giddens 1999). Marriage was often arranged by kin and for economic reasons; a farmer's daughter with some land of her own was a desirable wife. There was a double standard for the sexual behaviour of men and women, women were to be chaste brides and faithful wives whereas men could be more sexually adventurous without any loss of identity or esteem (Giddens 1999). Ireland as a country is considered to have a unique demographic in terms of family

formation (Coleman 1992; Fahey and Fitzgerald 1997; Guinnane 1997). At the birth of the Irish State in 1937, large, extended families were commonplace, traditional families were very fertile, with couples often having eight or more children. Men and women traditionally married late in life relative to their European counterparts (Coleman 1992; Fahey and Fitzgerald 1997; Guinnane 1997; Kennedy 2001). These families lived mostly in rural areas; many owned farms or worked as farm labourers in a country whose main source of employment was agricultural. Grandparents frequently lived with the larger family and so the household was very busy. Hence families needed children to help with the daily work of the farm. (Inglis 2008: 88) highlights that 'large families and emigration continued to be part of the Irish way of life through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries'. However, many citizens never married and these bachelors or spinsters lived with their siblings in the family household or joined a religious order. Also many young adults went into a convent or to the priesthood. Vocations have, however, declined over the last 40 years from 1,500 a year to less than 100 a year now (Kennedy 2001; Inglis 2008).

Two landmark studies illustrate the change over time of Irish farming families, firstly in a study titled' *Family and Community in Ireland'*, two American anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball (1940) looked at the dynamics of farming life in Co. Clare. Their research illustrated that there was a rigid family structure in farming families, which showed clear evidence of gendered roles and a patriarchal family system. The Irish family of the past was a unit of production and reproduction, for example very many Irish families' livelihoods were based on farming with 40 per cent of the population living on farms in 1950, whereas at the end of the twentieth century only ten per cent were employed in agriculture (Kennedy 2001). The farmer's wife and children were involved in the daily work of running the farm, like milking or herding cattle, seasonal tasks like harvesting and lambing, maintaining farm buildings, sowing crops. Picking potatoes was a popular job for children, and schools were often lacking pupils when they were needed as temporary labourers to 'bring in the spuds'. There was a gendered division of labour and the inequality of women was intrinsic to the traditional family, with women doing the vast majority of the caring work and domestic chores associated with the household (Arensberg and Kimball 1940).

Thirty years later, Hannan and Katsiaouni (1977) in a study entitled '*Traditional Families? From Culturally Prescribed to Negotiated Roles in farm Families'* looked at 408 farming families with the aim at looking at change in modern and traditional farms, in particular the interactions within the family. Three areas were the focus of the study (1) division of labour in sex roles (2) decision making patterns, (3) social-emotional patterns in the family. Their findings indicated that over 25 per cent of their sample had an egalitarian model of interaction rather than an authoritarian model. The findings also pointed to more blurring of boundaries in relation to gendered roles and specific tasks, like child-care. These two studies illustrate that there has been a shift in patterns of interaction in Irish farming families.

According to Hannan and Katsiaouni (1977) the spaces that genders occupied in these Irish families were ascribed to them by their traditional roles and daily chores. Men were the head of the household and his wife, siblings and children were his dependents. Farmer's wives worked in the home caring for children and relatives; a woman's life revolved around the area of the kitchen, cooking, washing, serving meals. The yard of the farm was a space frequented by the wife and the children, feeding and tending to hens and other livestock. The wider public area was infrequently visited by women from traditional Irish families, public space was only occupied by women on Sunday, the weekly attendance at Mass, or to the local town on fair days or in late summer to help with the harvest. It was widely frowned upon if women were seen in a public house, socialising in the home or a neighbouring house was the only option for women. Men were part of a more public life, trading at fairs, socialising in public houses, travelling to the creamery or to the mart (Kennedy 2001). Children usually shared a bedroom with their often numerous siblings and possibly with a Grandparent. The kitchen was a space occupied by the whole family together, not only at mealtimes but to socialise with visitors and to do homework or mending (Arensberg and Kimball 1940). Some more financially well off families had a 'parlour' in their homes, a space rarely used day to day and usually reserved for special occasions like Christmas or for entertaining a special visitor like the local priest. This parlour contained the best furniture and heirlooms, like crockery handed down through the family and typically the walls of this room were decorated with religious pictures which illustrated the influence of the Catholic church on the 'traditional' family in Ireland and on the space of the family home (Inglis 2008).

**Nuclear families**

Moving on from the era of the traditional family the concept of the nuclear family became very dominant in modern societies. 'The idea of the nuclear family clearly retains potency such that all other forms tend to be defined with reference to it' (Muncie and Sapsford 1995: 10). According to Goode (1970: 7) the nuclear family is considered to be the 'ideal type' or 'a theoretical construction, derived from intuition and observation'. In this sense 'ideal' can be taken to mean 'normal' according to Bernardes (1997) and something that may be attractive to political leaders because it asserts a certain perception of family life, one that is demarcated by gender divisions, the privacy of the home and parental responsibility for children (Bernardes 1997). Giddens (1992) argues that the notion of the nuclear family emerged from 1950's British and American suburbia characterised by the surge in availability of new homes and family cars after the recession in the post war years. The family was much less of an economic hub so there was more time for hobbies and relaxation. This lifestyle was represented through advertising, in films and magazines. Gadgets to help ease the burden of domestic chores became widespread, like electric ovens, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. In American society the home was idealised as a Utopian retreat which was supported by moralists and urban reformers. Hareven (1993) suggests that the home as a private haven is connected to gendered roles within the family; the woman is idealised as the homemaker and fulltime mother to her children, she is segregated into the private sphere in a culture of domesticity, whereas her partner, the breadwinner and out in the world of work, the public sphere (Hareven 1993; Valentine 2001) This was a time of great social change in many societies like those in the United States and Northern European countries where divorce was becoming more common but still difficult to obtain easily, especially for women (Giddens 1999). Pivotally, at this time there was a separation of sexuality from reproduction and so for the majority children were no longer inevitable but chosen (Giddens 1999). The parenting couple have now become the core of the family rather than part of an extended clan or kinship.

**The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on families in Ireland**

The Catholic Church has had a pivotal role in shaping families in Ireland for many decades; however, it could be argued that its influence has declined greatly in recent

times (Kennedy 2001; O'Connor 2008; Inglis 2008). The 'family that prays together stays together', a familiar refrain of the 1970's, a time when it was commonplace for families to attend various religious events such as the 'first Friday's' or 'Stations of the Cross' in neighbour's houses. But in contemporary Ireland younger people have less commitment to activities based around the Catholic Church (O'Connor 2008). According to Inglis (2008) even though 90 per cent of the population regard themselves as Catholic, most people however do not subscribe to the Church's moral teaching, in particular around sexuality and relationships. It is important to consider however that the teachings of the Catholic Church placed the family at the heart of society and reinforced the idea of the mother at home with the children and the father as provider and protector of the family. The Church's teaching on contraception meant that women had large families. Contraception was not legalised in Ireland until 1979 and the regulation of sexual behaviour and avoidance of sexual sins was of great concern to Catholic moral teaching. In Ireland for most of the twentieth century, Church and State were closely intertwined, and this is illustrated by the Criminal Law amendment Act of 1935 which had prohibited the sale and importation of contraceptives. 'The primary and almost exclusive concern of the bishops has been to preserve Catholic moral standards of family life' (Humphreys 1966:54-55). In 1973 the ban on the sale of contraceptives was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the McGee case. Contraceptives were then only available to married couples until a change in the law in 1985, which allowed single people the same rights.

As a nation we have a high birth rate outside of marriage and high levels of co-habitation, the referendum on divorce was supported, even though these are all against Catholic doctrine. However, there seems to be a conflict between Catholic doctrine and peoples lived practices. This 'behavioural drift 'seems to be a feature of modern Irish families according to Kennedy (2005: 5) who goes on to argue that we now have a 'secular value system' instead of taking our values from the pulpit on Sundays; we now turn to books in particular self-help books, television programmes, radio and magazines. A good proportion of marriages are now civil rather than religious occasions, civil marriages represented 22 per cent of all marriages in 2005, four times as many as in 1996 when only six per cent of marriages were civil (Central Statistics Office 2007). Perhaps another factor in the decline in influence of

the Catholic Church has been various Clerical abuse scandals, as outlined in the Murphy (2009) and Ryan (2009) reports recently where Church members apparently did not follow their own teaching. Failure to acknowledge abuse has angered victims and the general public alike, especially protecting clergy in the Church by moving them abroad or to a new parish. It could be argued that these recent events have badly tarnished the largely invisible good work of many of the Clergy.

Although there has been a distinctive shift in attitude away from the influence of the Catholic Church in family life there are still some aspects that are almost as popular and relevant as ever. Many families still invest emotionally and financially in the Sacraments, especially the rites of passage, like Christenings, Holy Communions, Confirmations and Weddings (Inglis 2008). These religious occasions frequently represent one of the highlights of the year for a family, and much planning and thought go into making them very memorable. Also funerals for the vast majority are religious in nature, rarely secular (Nic Ghiolla Phadraig 1995). Although mass attendance is in decline it still remains above attendance levels in other Catholic countries according to Kennedy (2001). The influence of the Catholic Church is enmeshed with the Irish sense of identity, from language use to artefacts and ornaments in people's homes, to ritual practices (Inglis 2008). Our everyday speech is scattered with distinctively Irish phrases like 'Sacred Heart of Jesus, 'God bless', 'Please God'. Many homes have holy water fonts, statues, like the 'Infant of Prague' and Crucifixes. Giving up a special treat in the period of lent is still commonplace. Inglis (2008:144) suggests that the Catholic faith is deeply ingrained into the Irish psyche, stating that; 'the Church helped create and maintain a Catholic habitus, a collective conscience that became central to Irish identity, peoples' sense of belonging, and the way they behaved.' Ireland is a physically small state with a pretty homogenous population, ninety per cent of the population are ethnically white, and English speaking, the vast majority being brought up in the Catholic faith and attending Catholic schools (Inglis 2008). There is a strange and unique contradiction in most Catholic families' relationship with the Church, at the start of the 21$^{st}$ Century it appears that Catholicism is 'consumed' differently. Families are selective in how they intertwine practice and religious belief into their lives, for example seemingly ignoring the Church's teaching on contraception, but embracing the ritual significance of a child's Christening. In parallel with this contradiction it is

important to point out that many families in Ireland are from other faiths or regard themselves as not adhering to any religious practice.

**Gender Roles in modern families**

Gender roles in family life are central experiences for men and women in families (Hochschild 1989; Morgan 1996). According to Kennedy (2001) the Irish Constitution of 1937 regards home as the most important sphere of a woman's life. This situation has gradually changed over time. This has been helped by increased access for women to both second and third level education, the elimination of the marriage bar, a proviso that banned married women from working, and increased opportunities for women to take up employment opportunities outside the home. However, there was very little law reform in relation to family prior to the 1970's, feminist pressure groups and others helped to bring Irish family policy out of the Victorian age, to a stage comparable to family policies elsewhere in the developed world in the late twentieth Century (Kennedy 2001; Share et al. 2007). These family policies related to the protection of married women's property rights, the opposition to discrimination against women, and the legal status of separation and divorce. In a wider context, women's lives and responsibilities have changed but the corresponding cultural shift has not fully evolved yet. According to Beck, (1992) women are frequently trapped between competing ideologies, that of nurturing homemaker and career woman and contributor to the financial running of the home and family Caught in the grip of contradictions, many women are being simultaneously pushed towards liberation and career development and pulled back into traditionally ascribed roles (Beck 1992; Arendell 2001). Lefebvre (1971) writes that due to their connection with the home, time for women is cyclical in nature whereas men's experience of time is more linear. Linear time is the abstract forward moving time of modernity and is also associated with the public sphere. Women are more anchored to the private sphere of domestic duties and are inevitably bound up with nature's cycles, like pregnancy, birth, menstruation and the daily grind of meals and childcare. This distinction between time's cycle and time's arrow is rooted in gender roles according to Lefebvre (1971:73).

> 'Everyday life weighs heaviest on women…Some are bogged down by its peculiar cloying substance, others escape into make -believe, close their eyes to their surroundings, to the bog into which they are sinking and simply ignore it…Because of their ambiguous position in everyday life- which is specifically part of everyday life and modernity- they are incapable of understanding it.'

(Lefebvre, 1971:73)

The above quote paints quite a pessimistic picture of women's family life and is not shared by some authors such as Felski (1999) and Silverstone (1994) who argue that the view that repetitive routine domestic tasks of everyday are associated with women, and are thus negatively valued, this they argue is incorrect (Felski 1999; Silverstone, 1994). They argue that everyday routine tasks should been seen positively for the ontological security that they bring.

Ontological security according to Silverstone is rooted in the ordinary everyday routines and rituals.

> 'Everyday life, it is argued, cannot be sustained without order- and order manifested in our various traditions, rituals, routines and taken for granted activities- in which we paradoxically, invest so much energy, effort and so many cognitive and emotional resources. In the ordering of daily life we avoid panic, we construct and maintain our identities, we manage our social relationships in time and space, sharing meanings and fulfilling our responsibilities…'

(Silverstone 1994:1)

However, it is widely accepted that, mothers in paid employment are the 'juggling generation', dropping children to the child minder, making a presentation at work, bringing children to after school activities (Holloway 1999; Hochschild 1989; 1997; Coltrane 2000; Arendell 2001). Women's earnings have become very significant in the formal economy and vital in the co-resourcing of modern families according to Silva and Smart (1999), these authors suggest that paid work is considered socially dominant. Whereas nurturing and caring for others are activities where the self gets most subordinated to the needs of family members, especially in relation to personal time. For many full time mothers the boundary between work, leisure and personal time is rarely demarcated in the home (Hochschild 1989; Silva and Smart 1999). Research into mother's experiences of family life by Silva (2002) indicated that the

key setter of home routines for families was school hours and after school activities, furthermore, work routines of both parents can impact on the level of time a family spends together, especially if either a parent does shift work. In parallel with women's changing roles, men's roles have also changed considerably in the last decade (Hochschild 1997; Ferguson and Hogan 2004). In particular, due to the recent recession in the Irish economy many men find themselves out of paid employment and spending more time in the space of the home with their children. Traditional roles are changing; many men's lives once so firmly tied to the public sphere of work and breadwinning are now spending more time at home. Home that is often conceptualised as the private haven, in opposition to the public, the world of work (Douglas 1991; Hareven 1993; Valentine 2001). This has implications for many aspects of family life including child care. One of the biggest changes to family life is the extent to which child-care is seen to be the responsibility of both parents (Oakley 1974; Hochschild 1997). In 'traditional' families in the past the breadwinner was not expected to engage in domestic tasks (Hareven 1993; Kennedy 2001). Despite the fact that at the turn of the decade more than half of all mothers with a partner work outside the home, mothers still do most of the caring, with difficulties balancing home and work commitments (Silva 2002; Russell et al. 2004). Working parents generally rely on private arrangements to have their children looked after while they work, as there is little support for childcare from the state, according to O'Connor (2008).

## Researching families

The challenge of studying and theorising family life can be substantial; families are not predictable and very complex to study (Bernardes 1997; Smart and Neale 2007). Several disciplines study the family, however Bernardes (1997:4) states 'the main academic discipline supporting the existence of the family has been sociology'. Although, other academic disciplines such as psychology and anthropology have had as their focus the relationships and practices within families and their position within the culture and historical time (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Traditionally, sociology has regarded 'the family' as the key institution within which children develop to reach their potential and eventually to become a productive member of society and the economy (Bernardes 1997). Sociology offers theories to examine and understand

families, however the study of 'families' has been through several stages over the last one hundred years or so and the range of theories is broad in its scope. Functionalism is still considered one of the main approaches to the analysis of family life. The core idea of 'function' relates to the actions necessary to sustain a functional society, creating a framework that allows for reproduction, education, economic production and so on (Bernardes 1997). The functionalist view of the family was elaborated on by Parsons (1971) who reasoned that the structural features of the family created the framework for society. The main features of this framework are the obligations and responsibilities that guide people's actions, this is linked to gendered roles within the family. In this analysis the family is the key site of socialisation for children, a place where they learn what is expected of them (McKie and Callan 2012). Erving Goffman (1959) studied small scale social interaction in families. Goffman (1959) drew on metaphors from drama to illuminate his theory on families, he proposed that there are roles and actors within families and those everyday interactions are performed in various contexts.

However the study of families in social research in general has not been as prominent as other areas of enquiry, although there is a recent upsurge in interest in studying families and as a result new conceptualisations are emerging, especially in the last twenty years. The family was a site of much theoretical analysis for feminists up until the 1980's who were the first to highlight the unseen and undervalued nature of women's work; they also argue that the family can be a place of female subordination (Holloway 1999; Hochschild 1989; 1997; Felski 1999). This point is supported by (Share et al. 2007: 256) who state that;

> The family is linked to relationships of power and inequality in Irish society. It is a mechanism through which economic inequality is maintained and property rights are transmitted.

Feminist scholars by in large have treated the subject of 'family' seriously especially in terms of its political significance, there is much debate within this perspective about how to 'theorise' family (Smart and Neale 2007). There was a focus on exploring the relationship between the private world of home and the public world of work and how this affected women and family lives. One of the key debates for feminist scholars has been whether the home is a site of gender oppression (Hochschild 1989; Silva and Smart 1999). Feminist work has transformed general

understanding about 'the family' according to Smart and Neale (2007) however feminist research has now moved on to other areas of study and has less of a focus on family dynamics.

**New directions in research into families**

Smart and Neale (2007) suggest that there are three reasons why family research has become 'interesting' in the last two decades. They state the first reason is that family change as a result of an increase in divorce, co-habitation, lone parenting, blended families and gay partnerships drives the need to redefine what 'family' is. The second reason is the political debate that 'family life' is in decline, this needs to be thoroughly explored within family research as commentators often adopt pessimistic approaches to changes in family life (Silva and Smart 1999; McKie and Callan 2012). Thirdly, Smart and Neale (2007) argue that there is a keen interest in social research into relationships and intimacy within family life. This has been reflected in the work by Giddens (1992) and Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Gabb (2008, 2010). These aforementioned theorists have arguably brought 'the family' to the fore of current social research in tandem with insightful analyses of family life and intimacy. Smart (2007) proposes that there is now a need for a new conceptual field known as 'personal life' with regard to the study of families which has a focus on personal relationships within families. Smart's (2007) ideas concentrate on the emotional connectedness within families, she feels this is at the heart of understanding family dynamics. Further to these points Smart and Neale (2007) argue that family research has had a low status in sociological thought since the 1970's. Morgan (1996) also shares this view stating that family life as a topic has been marginalized within sociological study, the topic has not been as prominent as other areas of study such as labour studies, or class structures. Morgan (1996) goes on to say that sociology needs to move from regarding family as an institution towards an exploration of family practices, 'practices are often little fragments of daily life which are part of the normal taken for granted existence of practitioners. Their significance derives from their location in wider systems of meaning', Morgan (1996:186). There is some evidence that research into families and family relationships is incorporating these new ways of thinking (Smart and Neale 2007). Morgan (1996) expresses the view that families are defined more by what they 'do' therefore, family practices can be considered rather like a performance. These new

directions in conceptualising families facilitate new avenues for study into families'
lives. This new way of thinking is considered by many theorists as a 'cultural turn'
in the study of families (Morgan 1996; Smart 2007; Gabb 2008).

**Theorising the family, a psychological approach**

Families can be understood from a psychological perspective as well as a
sociological standpoint. Each family can be conceptualised as a system where family
members interact with one another and create and sustain relationships within family
groups (Minuchin 1985). From this family system perspective there is a recognition
that within the family there exists power relations and degrees of closeness between
various family members. In addition, that the family members know and understand
family norms and rules. The individuals within the family also recognise shared
practices, such as family routines and rituals (Sameroff and Fiese 1992; Fiese et al.
2002). The family as a system can also be considered as embedded within wider
systems (de Róiste 2006). Bronfenbrenner's (1979;1993) bioecocological theory
offered an approach where a person was conceptualised as developing within the
family, taking the view that children and families do not live in isolation but rather
live with wider family groups in communities and in historical periods. In the
Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model, the relationship between the
developing individual and the world is conceptualised as being part of a nested
system of graduated systems.

These separate systems according to Bronfenbrenner are dynamic in nature and each
layer of the system can interact with other layers. The *microsystem* is the first layer
of the system and is situated around the central core, where the developing person
with his or her dispositions and characteristics is located. This is where the
individual nature of the person is in interaction with the immediate environment, for
example if a parent is teaching a child how to ride a bicycle there is close direct
contact between the pair. The next layer is the *mesosystem* where individuals interact
with wider processes, for example one parent in the family to the other or children's
contact with peers or extended family. Positive or negative experiences in this
system can translate into other contexts for the developing person, for example good
communication with parents may carry over to good communication patterns with
peers or other adults. Beyond the *mesosystem* lies the *exosystem* according to

Bronfenbrenner. This layer is where institutions and organisations are located, these agents may not come into face to face contact with the developing person but nonetheless they can have an influence on their existence. For example the crime rate in the neighbourhood may not directly impact a small child's life but may stress the child's parents and thus impact on the whole family's quality of life. The next layer of Bronfenbrenner's model is called the *macrosystem*. Within this layer lie the socio-political ideologies of the time. Cultural values and attitudes are in this area of the model. Again like in the exosystem the influences upon the developing person are not direct but rather influence the type of society that the person grows up in. For example ideas around gender expectations or roles within the family or workplace can have an impact on the developing person. The outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model encompasses the chronsosystem. The layer is concerned with changes that occur over time. For example a person may move residence or emigrate over the lifecourse which influence the direction of their development and their quality of life. Career work and relationships go through changes over time.

## Looking to the future: Transformation of modern families

The shift from large and extended traditional types of family to the 'nuclear family' and onwards to new family types requires new concepts and theories in order to understand 'families'. Love of each other and love of children has become much more significant in late modernity, according to Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995), who along with Giddens (1998) suggest that marriage is now just a 'shell institution' still called the same name but its basic character has changed, and that the basis for a good relationship is good emotional communication. Giddens (1992) goes on to say that the ideal relationship amongst couples is the 'pure relationship'; a relationship that comprises of communication, mutual trust, disclosure, respect, understanding of each other's point of view and one free of violence and inequalities of power (Giddens 1999:58). He calls these types of relationships, 'democratic relationships', and asserts that they form an ideal basis for a family. Democracy in this sense also means an acceptance of parental and spousal obligations. Giddens argues that there has been a decline in the nuclear family of married parents and their children and he suggests this is not a bad thing, as family on traditional marriage could be seen as based on 'legally defined inequality' (Giddens 1999:65). He suggests there is a qualitative shift in how family members relate to one another:

'There is a global revolution going on in how we think of ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others' (Giddens 1999:51). The individualization thesis has become an explanatory tool for a sociological analysis of the family at the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ Century. This thesis emphasises that close personal relationships have become fragile and we are more mobile and networked as families (Bauman 2003; Urry 2007). The general diagnosis is that people's lives are becoming more mobile, more porous, and of course more fragile. 'a kind of refusal of lifelong plans, permanent ties, immutable identities….instead of fixed forms, more individual choices, more beginnings and more farewells (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 41). Families are changing and in tandem with family change there is a need for new research and theories about 'family life' Baumann (2003: 224) describes it thus,

> 'From traditional family forms of the past decades, to the nuclear family model and now to the possibility of new family types in the future.' Families now, due to divorce, gay marriage, single parenthood….. are very networked and not so much nuclear as unclear'

This same sentiment is echoed by Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995) when they state 'instead of one family type replacing another there will be a huge variety of ways of living together or apart which will continue to exist side by side.' Much has been written about the changing landscapes of families, Beck and Beck- Gernsheim (1995) for example, highlight the ways in which divorce and separation have changed families significantly and how children now very frequently may travel between two homes (Urry 2007) .We are no longer ordered by traditional models of the family, but are free to choose our family arrangements. 'Time honored norms are fading and losing their power to determine behaviour,' (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim 1995: 7).

> 'Women and men are currently compulsively on the search for the right way to live trying out cohabitation, divorce or contractual marriage, struggling to coordinate family and career, love and marriage 'new ' motherhood and 'fatherhood', friendship and acquaintance.'

> (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim 1995:7)

This quote reflects the complexity of modern families, and the challenges that parents face in balancing work and family. It highlights too, the task of attempting to

provide a theory which adequately considers these multifaceted aspects to family life.

## Children and Families

Children are often regarded as the defining feature of a family. However, children have been viewed differently throughout historical time and in different cultures (Aries 1962; Woodhead 1996; Cunningham 2006; Wyness 2006; James and James 2008). The conceptualisation of family has changed over the last number of years and so has the conceptualisation of 'childhood'. Exactly what 'childhood' is and where it begins and ends has been the focus of study for sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and historians for many years. Children and childhood are so integral to the life course that we assume that we know what 'childhood' means (James and James 2008; Mayall 2010). This section of the chapter aims to think reflexively about the taken for granted assumptions about understandings of the concept of childhood. At its simplest, childhood is understood as the early phase of human life by all societies across the globe. It is a developmental phase that begins at birth and ends in adulthood, and it has necessarily a biological dimension (James and Prout 1997; James and James 2008; Mayall 2010). Childhood can be defined in legal terms also. In Ireland under the Child Care Act 1991, the Childcare Act 2001 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) a child is defined as anyone under the age of eighteen years of age. Hayes (2002:21) provides this definition of childhood, although arguably there are many.

> Childhood is both a biological reality and a social construct. It is defined not only by biology, but also by a particular society at a particular time in a particular way which represents the view that society has of childhood.

The concepts used to explore the study of childhood 'are neither fixed nor freestanding, rather they are embedded in particular social, cultural and historical contexts' (James and James 2008:1). There is a commonly held view that childhood is disappearing because children have so much access to adult culture through the media, and that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are becoming increasingly blurred (Postman 1982).There are also a considerable number of institutions and powers that impact upon our conceptualisation of childhood. The government influences on our image of childhood with the provision it makes for

children and families, through legislation and through the institutions of education, and social welfare. Crucially, it is very difficult to imagine a child except in relation to an adult, and conversely hard to imagine an adult without referring to their childhood (Jenks 1996). Childhood can also be defined as a social structural space. Childhood is an enduring feature of the structure and institutional arrangements of all societies, a space inhabited by children until they grow up and the space is occupied by the next generation (Qvortrup 1994). Although, Qvortrup (1994) argues that the space may change in response to changing laws and policies and even attitudes towards children and children's rights. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that children cannot be conceptualised as separate from their families, if we want to know the child we have to understand their family circumstances. This next section will aim to trace a brief history through childhood in order to contextualise the concept of 'childhood'.

## History of Childhood

### Childhood in the medieval period

The study of medieval childhood has been the subject of academic enquiry for the last fifty years. Some historians write that 'childhood' was only discovered in the last two centuries, and that prior to this time 'little children did not count' (Aries 1962; Burnett 1983). In 1962, Phillipe Aries completed his pioneering work '*Centuries of Childhood'* in which he stated that in the medieval period from the fifth to the fifteenth century in Europe the concept of childhood did not exist as we understand it today. The function of the family was to transmit the name and estate of the father. Child mortality was high so there was little emotional attachment to children. Aries (1962) proposed that no specific terminology or language existed that marked out childhood as a particular phase of life. The child had a very marginal position in society. Children were considered an imperfect adult; childhood was simply a stage of life in preparation for adulthood (Burnett 1983; Heywood 2004). Children were not marked out as a special category, for instance, they did not wear a special form of dress that was different to adults ; they looked like miniature adults and were represented in Art in this way (Aries 1962). Velázquez's famous family portrait of the Spanish Royal family 'Las Meninas' in 1656 is a good example of this, where the children of the Royal couple appear to be dressed exactly the same as

their parents. Children had little formal education at this time beyond boys being apprenticed to skilled tradesmen in order to have a livelihood (Aries 1962). The medieval period marked a change from the time of the Greeks and Romans who had an interest in educating children although almost exclusively sons of wealthy families. Aristotle's '*Ethics'* is an example of some of the prolific writing on the subject of education for children (Heywood 2004; Cunningham 2006). During the medieval period, education and child welfare had ceased to be a priority in society, survival beyond childhood was the point at which life was deemed valuable (Aries 1962; Burnett 1983).

In essence, since the 1960's and 1970's the dominant discourse of the history of childhood in the medieval period has been that childhood was not important and that children were invisible. According to several historians of childhood this may not be true. In the last decade authors such as Cunningham (2006) and Ní Chonaill (2008) have taken a different view. They believe that there is enough evidence particularly through legal discourse and other writings from the period to assume that children and childhood were regarded as valuable in Medieval Europe. Cunningham (2006) in his book, *The Invention of Childhood* argues that contrary to Aries' (1962) view, medieval society did value its children. Cunningham (2006) outlines the example of an infant's grave in a seventh century Anglo- Saxon cemetery in Lincolnshire, England. Here, archaeologists discovered that the infant was buried with adornments such as glass beads and also with a glass feeding bottle, Cunningham argues that this is evidence of an attempt to care for the infant in life and to honour it after it died with a dignified burial, indicating parental love and care. Similarly, historian Ní Chonaill (2008) claims that in Ireland we have a unique source of evidence on child rearing practices in medieval times in the form of the Brehon laws. These laws illustrate that childhood and child rearing were considered worthy of detailed consideration and debate and of key importance to the society of the time. In particular the Brehon laws outlined the rules regarding the fostering of children. This is the largest archive of legal documentation for pre 1200 Europe in existence today. According to Brehon Law child rearing was one the four pillars of stability and social cohesion in society. There were extensive rules governing the care of foster children. Laurence Ginnel (1894) stated that fosterage supported by Brehon law was an important social system in medieval Ireland. It is this body of legal discourse that

Ní Chonaill (2008) argues that Brehon law was child centred in its approach and this is evidence that medieval Irish society valued child rearing and the quality of childhood. Most of the legal documents in Brehon law refer to children and two particular tracts of law that date by to the eighth century relate specifically to child rearing (*Cáin Íarraith*). These laws lay down standards for the treatment of children. The rules even extended to such mundane everyday aspects as the food that fosterlings ate (Ní Chonaill 2008; Ginnell 1894, The Annals of the Four Masters 1632-1636).

## Childhood and work

With the coming of the industrial revolution and mechanisation children were recruited to work in cotton mills, their small size and nimble hands made them valuable to their employers (Burnett 1983; Cunningham 2006). Many children were injured or killed in the course of their working day. There was outcry from social reformers and various Acts of Parliament were passed to put some limits on the exploitation of children, culminating in the1833 Factory Act, when employment under the age of nine was prohibited. This act led to the 'the half time system' this meant that for a child under fourteen years old for every eight hours that were worked another eight had to be spent in school Cunningham (2006). Children also worked in mines, on farms as potato pickers and helped look after livestock. Frequently girls helped to tend younger siblings. Children worked in shops or sold newspapers or matches. The economy of the working class and farmers was dependent on free or very cheap child labour. Children had to contribute as early as they were able (Stone 1990; Burnett 1983; Cunningham 2006).

## Childhood and work in an Irish context

Ireland's economy in the early twentieth century depended predominantly on agriculture. Frequently school attendance was interrupted because children had to help with the farm seasonally with tasks such as hay cutting, harvesting crop picking (Arensberg and Kimball 1940; Kennedy 2001). The situation meant that Irish children's childhood was often one of hard work and obedience to parents. This was noted in Arensberg and Kimball's ethnographic study of Co. Clare in the mid 1930's.

> 'In terms of formal sociology as Simmel might give us, the position of the parents is one of extreme super ordination, that of the children extreme subordination'

(Arensberg and Kimball 1940:59)

However this ethos of child labour and the resulting impact on a child's education was of concern to various authorities and attempts were made to redress the situation. The Killanin Committee of 1918 – 1919 recommended the enforcement of school attendance and a ban on paid labour up to the age of 14 years (Kennedy 2001). The *School Attendance Act* of 1926 required children to have at least eight years of schooling between ages six and fourteen. This was a complex situation as often parents depended on children to run the farm, in the census of 1926 13,000 juveniles boys aged fourteen and fifteen years worked in agricultural jobs. An Inter-Departmental Committee on Raising the School leaving Age (IDCRA) in 1935 was very conscious that many small farms relied on juvenile labour in agriculture and stated that this help was ' indispensable and its withdrawal would be a serious hardship to parents' (IDCRA 1935 :16) Daughters as well as sons of farmers were expected to contribute their labour from an early age although girls were regarded as contributing less economically and therefore were less valued (Kennedy 2001; Arensberg and Kimball 1940).

> Children begin to help in the house at an early age. Drawing water seems to be the chief occupation of boys. As girls grow older, they share a great many of the household chores or look after younger children. When a daughter reaches sixteen, if she remains on the farm, she must do a full day's work, and too often her life is one of unrelieved drudgery. The girls are favoured by neither father nor mother and accepted only on sufferance.

(McNabb, 1964:230).

Up until the 1930s when labour law changed, farm workers were recruited at hiring fairs. Illegitimate children whose average age was fourteen were 'hired out' by local authorities. Poor families also hired out their children. Large fairs were held in the spring in county towns throughout Ireland (Kennedy 2001; O'Donnell 1997). Author Liam O'Donnell (1997) in his book *The Days of the Servant Boy,* tells of being hired at a fair in Charleville in County Cork in 1923. The usual period of hiring was from

January to December. O'Donnell (1997) explains that the children were inspected by prospective employers for their physical attributes and skills – in order to work or slave to help their families back home. He highlights how the charges were keen to keep in touch with their families. 'The boys were always anxious to let them know back home how they were getting on'. (O'Donnell 1997: 63) Children aged fourteen and fifteen in the 1930' 40's and 50's also worked outside the agricultural sector, in industries such as laundries, jam and biscuit factories. Women's industries were run mostly on juvenile labour because wages paid to children were lower than for adults (Kennedy 2001). In 1961 agriculture was a greater net employer than industry in Ireland. Children were dependent for longer on their parents on average than two or three decades before. Although in 1964 only thirty per cent of sixteen year olds and fourteen per cent of eighteen year olds were in full time education (Kennedy 2001). In 1972 school leaving age was raised 14 to 15 years. With increased urbanisation and a decline in agriculture and child work, more provision was needed for families and children, which led to the introduction of children's allowance in 1944 (Kennedy 2001). The majority of seventeen year olds are now in full time education - 359,047 children are enrolled in secondary education at time of writing. (Education statistics database 2012).Currently in Ireland under the Protection of Young Person's (Employment) Act 1996 employers cannot employ children until age sixteen in regular full time jobs. Children under fourteen cannot be employed. According to the act children age fourteen and fifteen may be employed under certain conditions they may do eight hours a week light work in term time with a maximum working week in the school holidays is thirty five hours. An employee under eighteen is entitled to seventy per cent of the minimum wage. Of course the act only takes account of paid employment for children, many young children do work as informal carers for relatives.

There is a lack of statistical data on child carers, but from available information in a review carried out by Halpenny and Gilligan (2004) 2,996 children between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years help a family member or friend with a long term illness.

**Research into Childhood in Ireland**

In Ireland there were a number of anthropological studies that were undertaken throughout the twentieth century that help give insight into the role and position of children in Irish society. Much of this research was stimulated by Arensberg and Kimball's (1940) ethnographic research on the family in Co Clare in the 1930s. Later, Hannon conducted in-depth research on the Irish rural family in the 1970's (Hannan and Katsiaouni, 1977). Humphreys (1966) studied the Irish urban family of the 1940's. These studies were broad in scope and ethnographic in nature and sought to comment on the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on Irish family forms. However it did not expressly focus on children's experience. In the 1985, Greene et al. undertook a longitudinal study following up children born in an inner city Dublin hospital from the end of their mothers' pregnancies until age 17 years (Greene et al. 1995; Gaffney et al. 2000). The National Longitudinal study of Children '*Growing up in Ireland'* (2019 onwards) is a large scale research project and is currently providing useful insights into the lives of children and families in Ireland.

## Children as social actors

The evolution of a new paradigm for research into childhood in academia in the 1980's required children and teenagers to be acknowledged as social actors and their views and opinions about their lives heard in order to understand their experience (Prout and James 1997; Corsaro 2005; James and James 2008). According to Hardman (1973) two distinct problems exist for children in social and cultural studies, their lack of visibility and their muteness, and in addition to this, frequently children's views are silenced by those in power in society. Recently, the need for children's views to be expressed has moved beyond the academic realm into the political sphere with the widespread acceptance and ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 .The relevance of children's perspectives is now acknowledged by governments and policy makers and is also is key to children's advocacy groups such as Barnardo's and other non-governmental organisations (NGO's). In disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology up to the 1980's the emphasis when considering children was on their development and socialisation (Heywood 2004). The focus was on the child reaching adulthood as a fully developed and socialised individual, following a

predictable path from an immature child to a mature rational adult. This process according to Heywood (2004) prevented research into children as a particular category. Previously, the chief interest in children was in their socialisation as part of a cultural process (Bernardes 1997). Socialisation is regarded as a process acting upon a passive person, the child is not regarded as a purposeful social actor. Instead childhood is seen as a rehearsal for adult life and socialisation consists of the processes through which, by one method or another, children are made to conform in cases of 'successful' socialization or become deviants in cases of failed socialisation (Corsaro 2005). Anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1928) and Ruth Benedict (1935) worked closely with children in the early part of the century, however the focus of their research was the relationship between the socialisation process and personality development rather than the children's reports on their experiences. Research with children is rarely concerned directly with the views that the children have when talking about their family life.

However, this situation is changing and several writers in contemporary childhood research adopt a child focused research methodology (Christensen et al. 2000; Dunn 2005; Greene and Hogan 2005; Tudge and Hogan 2005; James and James 2008). Child focused research is not without its challenges, however, children's contributions to research are mediated by the researcher. In essence what children say is chosen, edited and represented by the researcher. The practice of consultation with children can be partial, where only some of what the child says is glossed over and rarely is the child ever given feedback or follow up (Christensen et al. 2000; Morgan 2005, James and James 2008). There may be an attempt to listen more to children's views but listening does not necessarily mean more hearing (Roberts 2008). The importance of the value of children's accounts in social research is outlined by James (1999:246) who observes

> Recognizing children as people with abilities and capabilities different from rather than simply less than , adults it may persuade us to be more adventurous in our methodology to find ways in which we can engage children in our research so our research *on* childhood can be effected through research *with* children.

## New Sociology of Childhood

From the early 1990's Sociologists such as Alan Prout, Allison James and Chris Jenks have advanced that a new paradigm for the 'Sociology of Childhood' is emerging. This new theorising has underpinned new research methodologies into children's lives. Prout, James and Jenks proposed in 1998 that there are some key sociological approaches to the New Sociology of Childhood: Childhood needs to be understood as a social construction, that it is socially, culturally and historically specific. Children are frequently viewed more as what she/he will become rather than how she/he is now (Corsaro 2005). Concepts such as 'child' or 'childhood' are conceptualised differently in different societies, that is to say a child in a war torn country living in a desperate situation is considered differently to a child in peacetime in an affluent society. In modern Europe today we usually associate childhood with innocence and vulnerability whereas a child in sub Saharan Africa may be a carer to younger siblings and expected to be responsible. The authors also suggest that childhood is a variable of social analysis, such as gender, class and ethnicity. Furthermore that childhood as a strand of social analysis is further cross cut with other stratifications for example, poverty, class, disability. A middle class childhood may differ from a working class childhood. A German protestant childhood may be different than an Irish Catholic childhood. Childhoods from a particular place or time can have a particular sense. A further premise that Prout and James (1997) and Jenks (1996) propose is that children need to be seen as active participants in their lives, not passive receptacles of knowledge that is poured into them with the parent as the teacher and the child a learner. The approach needs to be viewed as dialectical in nature. This interactive process between child and parent or carer is also supported by the work of the psychologist Bronfenbrenner (1979) who proposed that the developing child can only really be understood within the context of his or her family and in turn within the wider society.

## Rights of the child and rights of the family

Ireland has been part of an international shift in the position and status of children in the last few decades, chiefly facilitated by an increasing emphasis on children's rights but also stimulated by an increasing academic interest in children as people rather than objects of study (Canavan 2012: 24). Evidence for this change can be

seen in a number of key legislative changes in recent years. Most notably, the Child Care Act 1991 the Children Act 2001 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have been enacted to ensure that children can experience the best possible childhood that they can. In addition the creation of the position of an Ombudsman for children in 2002 and the National Children's strategy (Government of Ireland 2000) has helped place children at the heart of social policy concerns. Another very significant change in recent years has been the amendment to the constitution of Ireland with regards to the rights of children. Debate on the issue of constitutional change began in 1993 by former Supreme Court Judge Catherine McGuinness in the report on the Kilkenny incest case. This led to a discussion as to whether the state viewed the rights of the family as more important than the rights of the child. The referendum was also encouraged by the Constitution Review group which felt that a change to the constitution was necessary to reflect the ratification by Ireland in 1992 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2012). A joint committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children was set up in 2007, it produced three reports prior to the referendum in order to develop the proposed wording of the legalisation to strengthen children's rights (Oireachtas 2008, 2009, 2010). The culmination of these activities was the passing of proposed amendment to the constitution of Ireland on the 10th of November 2012. This change relates specifically to Article 42.5 of the Constitution. The new Article will be called 42A. This article aims to give 'fundamental rights' to the child and focusses on protecting children, supporting families removing inequalities in adoption and chiefly recognising children in their own right. The referendum commission (2012:9) argued that this constitutional change was vital to the best interests of the child as 'many of the current laws relating to children provide that in making decisions in particular cases, the Courts must consider the "best interests" or the "welfare" of the child to be the paramount consideration. There is no specific requirement to this effect expressed in the text of the constitution at present'. Children and families need to be protected by policy and legal frameworks, however this recent momentous constitutional change arguably safeguards children's rights more fully.

## Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter has traced the family types from the traditional family to the nuclear family and onward to new family formations. It traced the history of the Irish family since the birth of the Irish state in 1937, in particular the gender roles and spaces used by traditional Irish families. Family forms have changed significantly over the last number of years with an increase in co-habiting partners with children and an increase in lone, separated or divorced parents. Although the majority of families in Ireland according to the national census 2011 still comprise of, husband and wife with their children (Central Statistics Office 2011). Families based on democratic principles will possibly experience the highest levels of well-being for adults and children according to Giddens (1999). Love is said to be a defining feature of happy families, especially the love of children (Barnardo's 2008). Several contemporary researchers of the family suggest that even though society is becoming increasingly individualistic, people still yearn for closeness and intimacy with partners and with the family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Smart 2007; Gabb 2008). Our attitudes towards family have become more flexible, there is a much greater acceptance of divorce and remarriage and of co- habitation (Inglis 2008). From the time of De Valera's Constitution of 1937, women's roles have changed hugely in Ireland from being seen as working in the privacy of the domestic sphere to moving out into the public world of work. In the early days of the Irish Free State women had an identity constructed for them by political and ecclesiastical leaders; this identity was almost exclusively domestic in nature (Valiculis 1995). In families today, women have a dual role, both as a caregiver and a provider, the breadwinner model of man at the head of the household has declined significantly. However, mothers are still mainly responsible for childcare as in the past, even if most women are employed outside the home. Women's entry into the labour market has radically altered the tempo of the domestic sphere in other ways, there is an expectation that fathers will help out with daily household tasks.

The family is the site of much debate in politics and in everyday life, 'The family is a site for the struggles between tradition and modernity' (Giddens 1999:53) However, it would be impossible to go back to previous family forms, despite some political rhetoric about a decline in traditional family values (Inglis 2008). Family life in Ireland has changed dramatically in the last 40 years or so, it terms of family

formation, family types and attitudes (Canavan 2012). Yet paradoxically, family life has many continuities also, family practices such as child rearing and nurturance remain very important.

The second half of this chapter considered the status and nature of changing childhoods historically. How children and childhood are understood vary with the time and culture that they live in. It outlined the new paradigm of Sociology of Childhood which emerged in the 1980's and has informed new methods into researching children's lives, affording the children agency in the research process (Jenks 1996). Recent changes in the Irish policy and legal frameworks have strengthened the rights of children.  The chapter also outlined the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) who considers that children should be evaluated and understood as part of a family, and cannot be separated out of any analysis of families. Lastly, this chapter outlined the shift in the last two decades away from structuralist and functionalist theories of the family towards studying family practices (Morgan 1996) like routines and rituals in family life. Families can also be understood as being a system with a complex relationships and practices. The next chapter, therefore will bring the discussion of family practices and performances centre stage with a particular focus of routine and ritual within family life.

# Chapter 3 The Time and Space of Family

## Introduction

This chapter will review the literature specific to how families use their time as a unit, thus contributing to the portrait of modern families living in Ireland today.

Given that one of the aims of this research is to get an insight into how families spend time together, this chapter will focus on how this time is spent within families. It will consider the concept of time in families, but more particularly, time use in the form of routines and rituals. The latter section of the chapter will outline the literature pertaining to space use at home and how routines and rituals are performed in family spaces.

Time awareness changes with our age. Time also varies depending on the situation, the nature of the task, how enjoyable the said task is and the context in which the event is located in time for example during an enjoyable or absorbing task time passes quickly, while waiting at a bus stop time can drag (Daly 1996).

### Synchronising family time

Organising time in families is a complex task which needs to be negotiated between family members (Daly 1996; 2001). Commonly, busy families need to synchronise their schedules in order to organise their everyday activities (Mead 1928; Daly 1996; 2001; Fiese et al 2002; Urry 2007). As people's lives have become increasingly busy and their working lives more fragmented due to increased workload and shift work demands, it is more problematic to find leisure time that coincides with each other's routines (Snawerdt 2002; Fine Davis et al 2004; Fiese et al.2002). Fiese (2006) asserts that simultaneous free time is a rare commodity for many families today so much so that people have to actively work to maintain relationships not only between immediate family, but also with more distant family members. This is especially true of divorced or separated families, where the children may have to travel between two homes, maybe with a substantial distance between locations.

Bauman (2003) describes families that are fragmented socially and spatially as 'unclear' families, and that a lot of time is spent networking between family members. This scheduling and arranging of meetings for family occasions can also require more complicated logistics for the separated/divorced family liaising with the wider family, like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. However this familial 'co-presence' seems to be a very important part of family life. Strong ties cannot be sustained without at least some face to face interaction, even if the family member lives far away (Bauman 2003; Urry 2007). As many family members' time schedules are out of harmony with each other, this has implications for family meal times (Feiring and Lewis 1987; Blum-Kulka 1997; Daly 2001).

Eating together has added social significance; it is not just the nutritional value of the meal that is important but sharing a meal around the communal table is regarded as a very important aspect of family life (Bryant and Wang 1990; Blum-Kulka 1997; Levin et al. 2012). When family schedules are not synchronised there is less opportunity to sit down together to eat so 'Grazing' has become an increasingly important part of family food consumption patterns in families (Urry 1994; Fiese 2006). Grazing is defined as many small snacks eaten by a person throughout the day rather than sitting down eating with other people at a set time. Much less time is taken if the meal is eaten alone, whereas more time is spent on the meal when several members of the family sit down together. Urry (2007) states that some of the top necessities of life for families are obligations and occasions like Christmas, weddings and funerals. These special occasions have a ritual significance and help to create a sense of family solidarity. Eating out together is very important, or coming together for a shared meal for a Birthday or an anniversary celebration are important markers of time spent together (Meske et al. 1994). Frequently, families claim that they do not have enough time to be together and enjoy each other's company (Daly 1996; Barnardos 2008; Putnam 2000).

According to Minuchin (2002) small every day moments of time spent together should not be overlooked, unstructured family moments, often experienced by a subset of family (e.g. mother and son) are very meaningful for the family members involved. Family time is a subjective phenomenon mediated by what the individual members of the family wish it to be. Family time therefore has three distinct elements, family time as a source of memories, togetherness and positive

interactions; and spontaneous time and fun together, which is especially valuable (Arendell 2001; Daly 2001).

**Work life balance**

In contrast to life in Ireland in previous decades, feelings of being stressed, rushed or time pressured are seemingly widespread across society, causing concern for how this experience of time impacts upon individuals' and family wellbeing  and therefore putting pressure on family life (Daly 1996, Putnam 2000; Gillis 2001; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2007). Arguably, modern society is lived at a fast pace and family members spend less time together. The implicit assumption in much of the literature on family time, asserts that there was once plentiful opportunities for familial co-presence when occasions for family rituals were numerous and enjoyable (Gillis 2001).

However, the complexity in family life today has been influenced by various changes including changes in patterns of employment especially for mothers. In addition to these notable changes, research highlights that women with children who are in employment still bear most of the responsibility for childcare (Coltrane 2000; 2010). Hochschild (1997) calls this pressure on working mothers the 'time bind'. According to the *Australian Time Use Survey,* (2006: 10-11) the response most often given as to why individuals felt under time pressure was the act of balancing work and family, with equal proportions of men and women giving this reason. Work and family were not the only reasons cited, with others also referring to having too much to do, taking too much on, feeling pressures with time management, and so on. According to the Australian study (2006) men and women with a youngest child under 14 years of age were more likely to experience time pressure than those with older children only. Men were more likely to give this response if they have children aged under 5 years than if their youngest child was aged 5-14 years. This response was most likely to be given by men and women in couple relationships, perhaps reflecting that balancing work and family is not only about having time with children, but also about having time with each other. Managing work-family balance is a significant source of time pressure for parents with young families. While both men and women experienced this time pressure when they were caring for children women however were more likely to experience time pressure from the demands of

family and men from the demands of work (Coltrane 2000; Arendell 2001; Baxter 2009, 2010). This is in line with previous research which has shown that women with children often experience time pressure because of the level of paid and unpaid work that is often undertaken in the child-bearing years (Bittman and Rice 2002; Gunthorpe and Lyons 2004; Pocock et al. 2007). Time in the family is impacted upon by factors other than work or school, including, technology and more especially television, which effects how family time is structured. For example watching a favourite television programme or catching up on the telephone with a friend can dictate when a family will eat their evening meal.

**Technology and family time**

Technology inevitably influences the time and space that families spend together, and gives family time a distinctive feel and predictability (Silverstone 1993). Various technologies such as games consoles, laptops and smart phones as well as television impact on the routines that families maintain in their lives (Daly 1996; *Growing Up In Ireland* Survey 2009; Silverstone 1993; Spiegel 1992; Ventura 1995; Van Rompaey and Roe 2001). Television watching is very common in families in Ireland; the *Growing Up in Ireland* (2009) survey report that only 2 per cent of mothers responded that their nine year old children did not watch television on a normal week night in term time.

Much literature has examined the impact of television watching on family time (Silverstone 1993). It is estimated that families spend approximately 40per cent of their private lives with the television on: Ventura (1995) argues that if we want to understand family time we need to understand 'family- plus- media'. In particular 'media has moved in with family and has become one of its core components' (1995:29). Television can mediate families' everyday experience; it is a window into the outside world, linking the public and private spheres. Television 'extends our senses into distant places so that we can experience what is happening all over the world' (Elkind 1981:71). Urie Bronfenbrenner (2000) suggested that television viewing 'freezes everybody' and that we are all passive consumers of the medium. Children in particular can consume television in an uncritical way and the activity of watching television takes time away from other activities. Palmer (2006: 254) calls television the 'electronic babysitter' for children. Older children and adolescents

may have multiple technologies in their bedroom which according to Livingstone (2009) leads to a sense of living together but separately in the home. Figures from the *Growing up in Ireland* (2009) survey support this premise stating that 45 per cent of nine year olds had a television in their room. This is a shift away from more communal watching of television for families as compared to the past, where there was only one television, with less channels available, so the television was a the heart of the shared living space (Spiegel 1992).

However, some commentators suggest that when the television is watched at home there is a 'parallel' sociability of family members (Daly 1996). Watching a favourite television show all together is a common experience for many families (Silverstone 1993; Palmer 2005). More positive outcomes have been suggested for family television watching, in contradiction to the commonly held belief that no communication takes place when the television is on. Kubey (1990) for example reports that talking coincided with 21 per cent of television viewing occasions occurring in the family. This refutes the image of the frozen passive family in front of the television. Television viewing can structure time in the everyday life of families, insofar as family members may order their day around the rhythms of television programming (Silverstone 1993). For instance some of the family members may organize their weekend free time around sports broadcasts. The television can bring the family together; if arguably in quite a passive way. Many family conversations may centre around fictitious characters on television or sports or entertainment stars, it can provide common ground for interactions between members of the group (Palmer 2006). In addition Palmer (2006) advocates that there is evidence that good educational television can support young children's learning of vocabulary. Other types of technology referred to at the beginning of this paragraph impact variably on time and time use within families but an elaborated discussion of these is beyond the current remit of this review.

## Time and routines

Time spent within families is often established in routine activities, such as making meals or organising childrens' bedtimes or trips to work or school. Routines may differ between the working week and the weekend, or even over the holiday periods (Daly 2001; Fiese 2006).

There has been relatively little research into family routines especially from a qualitative perspective, and very little where whole families are asked their views on family routines (Churchill and Stoneman 2004). Much of the research that does exist is concerned with routines and family stability, with several studies indicating a positive correlation between family routines and general wellbeing of children and adolescents (Budescu and Taylor 2013; Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000; Fiese et al. 2002; Brody and Flor 1997; Taylor 1996). Additionally, research indicates that family routines can lead to better health outcomes  like a reduction in obesity in children (Anderson and Whitaker 2010) and better compliance with management of long term conditions such as asthma (Fiese at al. 2001; Fiese and Wamboldt 2003). Furthermore, according to Evans et al. (2003), lack of structure and organisation of time and routines can lead to a feeling of helplessness and a lack of self-efficacy in children and young adults.

Routine activities that frequently occur in most homes include regular morning and bedtime routines during the working week in addition to eating together in the evening  (Huston 2002). According to Budescu and Taylor (2013) household routine also refers to the level of consistency and organisation that is maintained by the family. Routines also have a positive impact on academic achievement and overall engagement with education (Fiese et. al 2002; Repetti et al. 2002; Taylor and Lopez 2005). Care givers who organise the family routines tend to monitor their children's activities to a greater degree and also tend to provide a dedicated space at home for the children to do homework for example. This strong school work routine at home can predict less engagement with antisocial behaviour according to research by Lanza and Drabick (2011).

Family life can be complicated, with routines that have to adapt to the time available and the changing schedules of family members. In addition, routines also have to adjust to the different developmental stages of the children (Fiese and Wamboldt 2000; Fiese 2006; McGoldrick and Carter 2003). Routines can vary with the seasons and with celebrations and holidays. According to Fiese (2006), family routines can be supportive but also constraining, demanding a great deal of time to execute. It can be difficult to harmonise activities for each member of the family and family routines are often led by the needs and activities of the children which can be simultaneously fulfilling but also place significant demands on the parents' personal

and financial resources (Daly 2007). The challenges of planning and carrying out family routines falls heaviest on women according to Hochschild (1997) who argues that women may consider outside employment as a relief from home routines that can be repetitive and demanding. Family routines are supported by help from other family members, especially grandmothers and sisters but also friends. Car-pooling with neighbours for the school runs, or a child going to an aunt after school while the parents are at work are common occurrences that facilitate and sustain family routines. This wider network of support from friends, neighbours and extended family illustrates that family routines are rooted within communities and society (Bronfenbrenner 2005).

Each family creates and develops their own unique and special routines building a firm foundation based on shared understandings between family members about what behaviour is appropriate within various family contexts and what time is available to them in which to negotiate (Blum-Kulka 1997; Fiese 2006). An example of these particular family routines may be a snack together before bedtime or a nightly story for a younger child or even a text message from an adolescent to a parent to say that they have arrived safely at a friend's house.

**Mealtime routines**

Family mealtimes are a very important dimension in the study of family routine (Bosssard and Boll 1950; Blum-Kulka 1997; Fiese 2001). Shared family mealtimes arguably are in decline according to contemporary political, media and academic debates on family mealtimes, and the underlying assumption is that this is a bad situation (Ralph 2013). Family meals are still important to families according to Ralph (2013) who carried out secondary data analysis of three generations of Irish people born from 1934 to 1974. This mirrors research by Meske et al. (1994) who stated that Sunday dinner is an important family occasion still for most families.

- Family mealtimes tend to have some consistent elements (Fiese 2006).
- Role assignment is another characteristic of family mealtimes in particular in terms of division of labour.

- Manners and appropriateness at the table is a very key aspect to family mealtimes as well as expectation for attendance at the meal, especially if it is a special occasion.

- Conversational turn taking and dialogue are features of family mealtime routines (Blum-Kulka 1997).

- Seat assignment, everyone has a set place to sit and knows 'their place'.

There is a distinct division of tasks around many families' routines at mealtimes with different kinds of 'food work' being done by men and women (Ralph 2013). Mothers tend to do most of the food shopping, planning and serving of the food. This is supported by Coltrane (2000) who states that women on average spend three times as much time as men on housework and especially around the preparing and serving of food. Additionally, children are usually served first and eat first, possibly this is so that the parents can eat their meal knowing that their children are already fed (Feiring and Lewis 1987).

Family interactions at mealtimes may appear on the surface to very ordinary but are fundamental to the socialisation of children and adolescents. These family routines are imbued with cultural expectations about appropriate behaviour such as the expectation of waiting to eat until all family members are seated and the use of language such as 'please' and 'thank you' (Blum-Kulka 1997; Fiese 2006). Mealtimes can be described as a 'familial speech event' according to Fiese (2006:15) where rules of conversational turn-taking are often learnt over shared family meals. Blum-Kulka (1997), states that manners and social norms around appropriate behaviour and modes of interaction are frequently reinforced around the family table. Mealtimes can also be an opportunity to learn conflict negotiating skills, where debates and little tussles over meals allow children and adolescents to engage in important life lessons in a secure environment (Vuchinich et al. 1988). Family size and composition can affect the level of communication and interaction between parents and children at mealtimes. Single parents tend to engage in greater levels of interaction with the children than when two parents were present possibly because there was not always another adult to interact with (Ramey and Juliusson 1998).

Another aspect of mealtime routines is the idea that each family member has their own place at the table, an arrangement that each person in the family is aware of. When there are guests or absences at meals this can alter the atmosphere and seating positions, making a perceptible difference to the group (Fiese 2006). Eating together appears to confer protective effects on family members, especially in adolescence, guarding against risky behaviour in teenage boys and girls (Levin et al. 2012). According to Larson et al. (2001) in their research on adolescent reports on family routines, family mealtime routines provide important structure for adolescents. Larson et al. (2001) concluded that although the total time that adolescents and parents spend in each other's company may decline in the teenage years the significance and protective effects of family routines, like mealtimes, nevertheless remain significant to the well-being of the individual.

**Bedtime Routines**

Literature on bedtime routines suggests that for young children, bedtime routines are comforting and supportive (Budescu and Taylor 2013; Fiese et al 2002) and can reduce disruptive bedtime behaviour and night waking. In particular, the use of a social story at bedtime (Burke et al. 2004) supports this positive experience. In a small research study by Kuhn and Weidinger (2000) findings highlight that regular bedtime routines can also lessen frustration in parents as well as helping children display less tantrums at bedtime. As there is evidence to show that regular routines increase family stability it is reasonable to assume that regular bedtime for children promotes a sense of predictability and security. Routines for very young children are rooted within their biological needs for regular sleep and feeding, this naturally has an effect on their parent's time (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Routines are linked to the developmental stages of family members and are modified according to various life cycle transitions. Time and routines are inevitably linked within any analysis of family and family time. An extension of this concept of time lies in the understanding that family routines vary not only with the amount of time available but also in relation to the time of day.

Further to this is the embedded nature of time and development and in essence the life cycle of individual within families. Routines therefore vary at different stages of the life cycle and 'families, like individuals, have a life cycle (Fiese 2006: 43). The

family life cycle consists of the phases of being married or co-habiting as a young couple, living with young children, then having adolescents, children moving away, then possibly grandchildren and so on (McGoldrick and Carter 2003). These phases may not be separate from each other and there may be disruptions such as marriage break up, remarriage and the blending of families. Adult children may return home to live with their parents and this may result in further changing or reconfiguring of family routines (Fiese 2006). The key variable however is the concept of time. Bronfenbrenner (1979;1993) in his bioecological model argues that personal development changes over time, so routines change as the individuals in the family get older, eventually children leave home and routines for the couple or parent at home may be much simpler with a different use of time.

**Routine and domestic labour**

The demanding nature of time and routines is evident in the fact that in order to function effectively, routines inevitably contain a level of work and commitment from the family members and this raises some debates around how much each family member should be expected to help out with household chores in order to maintain family routines. Research consistently shows that women do most of the domestic labour at home despite often being in paid employment (Coltrane 2000; Schober 2013). Coltrane (2000) suggests that women see housework as obligatory whereas men see it as optional. Hochschhild (1989:47) in her book '*The second shift'* suggests that when it comes to household labour men frequently make 'token contributions' doing a particular task that is meant to encompass their share of the domestic tasks. Although in a recent study by Thomas (2009) carried out in Sweden, the author concluded that men with extended parental leave did participate in an equal amount of hands-on childcare and other household tasks but this only continued if their partner returned to full time employment. There may be a distinction between how much fathers help with family routines depending on the time of the week also. Research conducted by Hook and Wolfe (2012) in a study of time use by new fathers in the United States, Norway and Germany concluded that fathers do spend considerably more time on interactive child care and child play at the weekends but not during a typical working week.

Leonard (2009) in a recent Irish study explored children and adolescent's perceptions of family obligations in helping with household tasks at home. The teenagers in Leonard's (2009) study expressed that they felt a sense of duty and responsibility towards their family unit and felt that it was fair that they helped out. However, much of the research into the involvement of children with household labour tends to draw on the views of the parent (Gill 1998; Goodnow and Delaney 1989). The thrust of the argument within these studies is that parents are active in helping their children to become socialised through giving them appropriate responsibility for household tasks. According to Gill (1998) children are socialised through the activity of housework, parents use positive and negative reinforcement to integrate children into doing tasks, also asserting that parents increase the complexity of household jobs as the children get older. For example, simple tasks like laying the table for a young child and more demanding tasks like cooking a meal for an adolescent. Gill (1998) goes on to say that when mothers become more involved in the outside world of paid employment children's participation in household labour increased although girls involvement increased more than boys. Brannen's (1995) study of adolescents explored a distinction between self-care; cleaning own room and family care; helping with meals, suggesting that adolescents in general felt that they should help with self-care but not as much with family care. Helping with domestic duties is rarely considered from the child or teenagers point of view although there is a growing interest in the new sociology of childhood to consider children's accounts of household labour (O' Brien 1995; Leonard 2009). The accounts of families' participation in housework has, therefore, been largely ignored in the literature and needs much more consideration within family research

## Family Rituals

The discussion to date has highlighted the central place for routines within family life and practices. The next phase of this review will focus more specifically on the concept of family ritual and will begin by considering if there is in fact a difference between routines and rituals. By way of introduction it is important to state that ritual is closely connected to family routines and arguably routine slides towards ritual through repetition (Fiese 2006). Family rituals can be very significant for each individual family and perhaps a particular ritual is unique to that family because it

has passed down through the previous generations (Fiese 2006; Daly 2006). 'The development of a ritual by a family is an index of the common interest of its members in the family as a group' (Bossard and Boll 1949: 468)

**How are rituals different from routines?**

Routines are repetitious family practices that structure the days and weeks of ordinary living, however they are not imbued with the symbolic content and the anticipation that rituals possess. (Keltner et al. 1990; Viere 2001) Fiese (2006:240) explains that rituals contain an emotional element and carry more meaning for family members than routines. She reiterates that 'the repetition of routines over time sometimes creates the foundation for a ritual through eager anticipation and emotional investment'.

Regardless of factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity or religion, four types of ritual seem to be common to nearly all families; these include family traditions, family celebrations, family life cycle events and day to day life events that have become ritualised (Baxter and Clark 1996; Fiese and Wamboldt 2001; Wolin and Bennett 1984).

Wolin and Bennett (1984) claim that two key components to successful family rituals are: firstly, the individual families' commitment to 'ritualising' where there is often one member who is a ritual specialist, someone who organises the family group at key occasions and liaises with the other family members to stage the event. Secondly, the families' capacity to adapt ritual throughout the life course is very important, this aspect involves a historical dimension, and the family members draw on their childhood experience and the customs and patterns of activities of previous generations of their family. The phenomenon of rituals has also been explored by Steinglass et al. (1987) who highlighted that there are five types of family rituals that are clearly distinct from family routines these include the following.

(i) **Bounded rituals** which are prepared with anticipation and have a distinct beginning middle and end.

(ii) **Identifiable rituals,** where all family members are aware of and can describe.

(iii) **Compelling rituals** in which the family commits time and energy in maintaining.

(iv) **Symbolic rituals** which are intensely meaningful for the family members.

(v) **Organising rituals** which create and maintain stability for the family.

If rituals become mundane then they can slide into routine, furthermore families frequently abandon some rituals and traditions and also create new ones (Bossard and Boll 1949, 1950 Pleck 2000; Viere 2001).

**Previous research into family ritual**

Sociologists, Bossard and Boll (1949), with their seminal work *'Rituals of Family Life'* are considered to have published the first substantial work on family ritual in academia. Ritual has also been considered by anthropologists but mainly from a religious standpoint according to Moore and Myherhoff (1977). Most recent research about family ritual has been concerned with the therapeutic value of ritual and routine in families (Baxter and Clark 1996; Fiese et al 2002; Fiese and Wamboldt 2001, 2003). There has however, been relatively little research on the differences in family ritual within and between families across cultural divides. Ritual is seen as having an important role in the socialisation of children, teaching them about appropriate behaviour, for example parental expectations about how to behave when eating dinner at the grandparent's house, with greater expectations of good behaviour and manners from older children as compared to their younger siblings (Baxter and Clark 1996; Feiring and Lewis 1987; Blum Kulka 1997; Pleck 2000; Fiese 2002). Rituals can also change and evolve according to the life cycle in a family. Christenings, birthday parties and Halloween 'trick or treating' are often important family rituals for children at a relatively early developmental stage. Whereas, at a later developmental stage such as in adolescence or in early adulthood, college graduations and landmark birthday celebrations may be more prominent rituals in the family (Sameroff and Fiese 1992; 2000).

**Ritual and family stability**

Families with a high commitment to 'ritualising' enjoy an emotional closeness and a supportive atmosphere for the family group (Wolin and Bennett 1984:415). However

according to Wolin and Bennett (1984) families with a low commitment to ritualising have less cohesiveness and identity as a group, their focus is outward looking and they are orientated to the present with family members spending more time apart than together. Their time together lacks the level of symbolic meaning shared by the members of the family group. Family rituals are considered as being very important in providing togetherness, strengthening family relationships, providing as sense of security and well-being and creating a supportive network of family contact (Meske et al 1994; Fiese et al 2002). As a consequence of their symbolic nature, rituals may provide an opportunity to reinforce family belongingness and identity (Cheal 1988; Bennett et al. 1998). Family rituals around ceremonial occasions provide continuity and ritual is seen as a practice that is reinforced by generational transmission (Rosenthal and Marshall 1988). The involvement of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts helps provide family continuity and a shared sense of meaning making between individual members of the family. According to Bossard and Boll (1950) family rituals help develop pride in the group as they are frequently cooperative and this stimulates group cohesion.

However, the question arises as to whether rituals are always positive? There is a great deal of work and cost involved in organising special occasions in families (Meske et al. 1994). Christmas in particular can involve a lot of expense and attention to detail for the 'ritual specialist' in the family (Pleck 2000:115). Gender is bound up with ritual, according to Pleck (2000) for example, men and women can have stereotyped roles to play in ritual occasions, father carves the turkey, mother or grandmother make the Christmas pudding. Women also are responsible for other kinship work such as choosing the Christmas and birthday gifts, a process often documented as very stressful (Pleck 2000; Viere 2001). Erving Goffman's (1959) idea of gender display on ceremonial occasions is helpful in understanding gender and family ritual, where activities and roles are demarcated on gender and age lines. Mother, at the centre of the family is the nurturing organiser, possibly a very sentimental or idealised version of middle class domesticity (Pleck 2000). Ritual can be very closely intertwined with food consumption, decorations for the home, expensive treats, so called greeting cards for 'hallmark occasions' the commercialisation of occasions such as Christmas, Valentine's day, or Halloween

(Pleck 2000). During these events some family members can feel excluded on ritual family occasions and this can lead to stress and loneliness (Pleck 2000).

The previous paragraph points to the elaborate nature of family rituals such as Christmas or Easter celebrations, and points to several studies examining traditions that were important to families. These traditions were considered as rituals. According to Fiese et al. (2002: 383) 'the most frequently listed family rituals were birthdays, Christmas, family reunions, Thanksgiving, Easter, Passover, funerals, and Sunday activities including the Sunday dinner' However ritual can also involve very simple activities, and this could encompass very minor occasions such as watching television together, the Sunday drive, doing the dishes, the evening snack or carving a Halloween pumpkin. The study of the simplicity of family rituals has been described by Bossard and Boll's (1949) in their study of family ritual. These researchers state that  what the ritual is about  is wholly incidental and trivial, 'what is significant is the family gathers nightly, engages in a common experience, relaxes together, and exchanges comments before retiring' (Bossard and Boll 1949:469).

## Family Space

It is not just that the spatial is socially constructed: the social is spatially constructed too'

(Massey 1984a:6)

The above quote from Doreen Massey in her book *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* serves to bridge the discussion into consideration of the spaces occupied and utilised by families. Regardless of the simplistic or elaborate nature of family routines and rituals the important point to discuss therefore is the connection of space to family life and practices. This section of the chapter will outline relevant research pertaining to this topic area of space use by families. It is evident that the space of the family is inexorably tied to time that families spend together. Family life is lived in particular ways and is mostly centred at home. Our understanding of space is tied to the physical environment such as the architecture and buildings that we inhabit but space has a social dimension.  As the quotation from Massey (1984) above suggests, space is structured by social agents, by families using their homes or by school children attending their school (Valentine

2001; Loxley et al. 2011). Urry (1995) argues that within the discipline of Sociology space is regarded as a container for social action and human existence rather than an important construct for understanding social relations. This is also reiterated by Soja (1971: 8) who writes 'there has been no attempt to explore the spatial dimension of societal organization on a level equivalent to the extensive examination of kinship and contract relations.' Geographer Doreen Massey (1984) states that the concept of space has been viewed as a poor relation to time as an explanatory tool for understanding human behaviour. Whereas ecological theorists like Bronfenbrenner (1979) regard space as intrinsic to human activities, as a context to allow the creation of social relationships and the consequent development of the self which in turn impacts on how that self relates to the social and physical environment.

**Negotiation of space in the home**

Use of family space has changed in the last number of decades; this is linked to changes in patterns of employment in tandem with family role change. Currently in Ireland, women with children are likely to work outside the home and men are likely to be involved to some extent with day to day running of the household and childcare (Kennedy 2001). In Ireland in the year 2000, 50 per cent of women with children worked outside the home in paid employment either on a full time or part time basis (Russell 2004). In the years of sustained economic growth in Ireland from 2000 to 2007 there was a parallel growth in housing development and the construction industry, homes that were built for families were larger than ever before (Inglis 2008). Family size was declining according to Kennedy (2001) whereas homes were larger, it was becoming increasingly commonplace to have multiple living rooms and bathrooms where this was not the norm for families just a few decades earlier.

According to Pinho and Silva (2010) how we spend time in modern families is structured by the space we occupy at home and this domestic space use is linked with ideas of sharing, privacy and ownership. These factors can lead to competition for space which can cause conflict between family members (Daly 1996; Christensen et al 2000) For example, family members may gravitate to the favourite armchair near the television at the same time. Conflict over space is linked to rights and privileges of the family member, for instance the adults or older siblings having more privileges like going to bed later or having the best seat at the kitchen table.

Wood and Beck (1994) argue that home life can be underpinned by unseen rules and regulations around the maintenance of spatial boundaries at home. These rules are communicated to the children, for example instructions about not going in Daddy's study or not wearing shoes in the 'good' living room.

Family members often have an idea of how they want to use the spaces in the home but this has to be worked out with other family member's ideas and plans (Daly 2006). In traditional family homes in past decades, family members often had to share communal areas such as kitchens or dining rooms, these rooms were used for work, for sewing or cooking but also for playing cards or listening to the only radio in the house. Frequently the family were restricted to one communal area due to lack of heat or light in other rooms especially in wintertime (Hareven 1993; Kennedy 2001). In contemporary family homes, this situation as regards space sharing at home has changed, leisure time has become more fragmented with family members pursuing separate activities in different parts of the home, one person watching a 'soap opera' on television; another on the computer in the office (Valentine 2001; Palmer 2006; Livingstone 2009; Quinn 2010). Many modern homes are divided up into segregated areas, playroom for children, good living room for parents, but these spaces can overlap or indeed can be 'timezoned', that is to say, that youngest children have access to the television room during the afternoon, while the parents or older children may use the same space later in the day (Munro and Madigan 1999).

### Gender and space at home

Gender is a significant variable that impacts upon the spaces that are occupied at home, although not a great deal of literature focuses on domestic space use and gender. Current research in this area is frequently taken from a socio-political standpoint considering women's lives in spaces of power (Belk at al. 2009; Larner et al. 2013; Newman 2013; Schmucki 2012; Spain 2011). Gendered space has also been considered from a feminist standpoint (Cieraad 2002; Holloway 1999; Tivers 1985). Home has traditionally been associated as a retreat from the world according to Hareven (1993) however, feminist writers such as Hochschild (1989, 1997) argue that home can be a site of oppression and obligation for many women.

Mothers are generally more associated with the kitchen and the workshop or garage are considered more the domain of fathers (Pinho and Silva 2010). So, in essence, the understanding of spending time together is linked to space and gender, and in addition to this the experience of time in families 'cannot be divorced from both the material and symbolic organization of space' (Silverstone 1993:287).

The study of men and domestic space use is an underdeveloped area of study according to Gorman-Murray (2011) who carried out research in Australia exploring the meaning of home for men who were recently made redundant from their employment. Within this research Gorman-Murray (2011) states that there is a distinct shift from the primacy of the workplace to home as being a place of identity and well-being.

**Space and developmental age of the children**

Space use in the home just like family routines and rituals is often dependent on the ages of the children in the family (Christensen 2000 et al.; Valentine 2000). For example, when children are first born they may share their parent's bedroom before gradually migrating to their own bedroom or sharing with a sibling. As children grow older they may use the spaces in the home differently as they mature, for example, bathroom use may evolve to a teenager spending more time in front of the mirror, taking showers instead of long baths that were more of a practice associated with childhood. Teenagers may also spend a great deal more time in their bedrooms than when they were younger children. There may be more negotiation of space use at home as the children grow older, where positive outcomes to these negotiations may be difficult to achieve. Potentially, there is a risk of conflict about shared space leading to disagreements as teenagers may feel that they should have more autonomy to entertain friends in communal areas of the house, with complaints from adults about noisiness, staying up late and messiness (Munro and Madigan 1999). Bedroom space for example especially for older children and adolescents may be considered a private retreat from the rest of the family. Boundary making can be achieved in the bedroom by personalising the space with possessions, such as posters or various technologies such as laptops or phones (Sibley 1995b; Valentine 2001; Griffiths and Gilly 2012).

**Spaces of intimacy**

Shared spaces can often be very intimate, such as sharing bath time for young siblings, night-time storytelling or co-sleeping for parents with their young children, especially at moments of vulnerability such as when a child is unwell. These moments provide very thoughtful and sensitive insights into the nature and meaning of shared spaces and relationships in families. There is very little academic literature on researching intimacy in a domestic setting from a sociological/geographical perspective, although Gabb (2004; 2008; 2009) is a notable exception. Gabb (2008) in her project *'Behind Closed Doors'* looked at spaces of intimacy in family life, using creative methods to gather data such as maps for the families to use when describing the spaces they used at home, she engages with the concept of family intimacy and emotional connectedness in the home. Gabb (2008) explicitly recognises the relationship between family closeness and the spaces that the family members occupy in their home. Although Gabb's research includes family members she does not focus exclusively on children's views on the spaces they share in the home so this presents a noticeable gap.

# Children's geographies

James (1990) argues that there is a lack of concern with children's views on space use in many research fields. When considering spaces that family members use in their homes the emerging field of children's geographies is useful in analysing the accounts those children give of where they spend their time and engage in various activities such as play. According to Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) the impetus for research into the geographies of children has its roots in several areas; the first of these is feminism and in particular research into the changing nature of work for women in industrialised countries in the late twentieth and the early twenty first century. Several writers such as Hochschild (1989, 1997) and Holloway (1999) studied how mothers in paid employment managed the challenges of juggling work outside the home with childrearing. In addition to this type of research, feminist geographers such as Tivers (1985) aimed to highlight the experience of mothers raising their children in the private world of the home. However, children's views were absent from the literature, with the emphasis of the research being centred on

the mother's experiences of providing child care rather than the subjective accounts from the children (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011).

A second strand of research that led to a focus on children's geographies originates in the 1970's with research such as Aitken (1994; 2000) that focused on children's experiences in the adult-mediated built environment. This original research aimed to bring children's experience to the fore on the geographical agenda, for example to consult with them in the construction of play areas rather than leave the planning solely to adults who aimed to interpret what children wanted or needed.

Thirdly the emerging field of children's geographies draws on relatively recent developments within the paradigm of the new sociology of childhood. There has been a move towards a greater emphasis on the voices of children together with their care givers in the exploration of family processes (James et al. 1999; Jenks 1996; Christensen 2000). For example, studies such as Holloway and Valentines's (2001:18) study of the micro-geographies of Information Communication Technology (ICT) usage within families which highlights the significance of 'adult-child power relations in shaping everyday sociospatial practices within the home' Thus the interest in studying the experiences of children as subjects in a world constructed by adults comes from a variety of disciplines. There is a clear gap in the literature about children's co-constructed narrative accounts of how they share space with their family especially within the naturalistic setting of the home.

**Play Spaces**

Play is a key dimension when considering children and the spaces they use. Even very young children can articulate how they think about the places that they play in (Punch 2000). Children actively engage in play in social spaces, Satoshi (2013) states that preschool children can create and define play space when engaging in collaborative pretend play, expanding or contracting the limits of their play area. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1993) space is intrinsic to human activities, in play spaces, such as playgrounds children are very capable of initiating actions and games with other children rather than needing to be constantly encouraged by adults. Given the opportunity to play in a particular space such as the school yard, children

will actively seek to recruit others into their social play (Loxley et al 2011). Tudge and Hogan (2005) also point to this active agency in play as long as children have a free space to create and develop their play. Research into children's spaces in suburban contexts in Ireland has been conducted by Corcoran et al., (2009), this research explores the concept that children embody a great deal of sociability, they help to construct bonds and connections within their neighbourhood. The children in the study by Corcoran et al. (2009) were keen to reiterate their desire to have access to public spaces within their neighbourhood.

This free space is at a premium in many urban areas, often play spaces like play-parks and adventure centres are developed to address this issue Aitken (1994; 2000; McKendrick et al. 2000). Although the play-parks are developed to suit children's needs children are rarely consulted about what they would like to see in these special child centred areas (Aitken 1994). In contrast to the places that are specifically designed for children, the countryside and nature can be constructed as 'pure spaces' to play for children, a rural idyll where children are free to explore in nature (Aitken 1994; Sibley 1995b Jones 2000; Valentine 2001; Skår and Krogh 2009). Urban spaces are often viewed as less conducive to free play for children, less inviting and also less safe. Valentine (2001: 270) refers to this dichotomy between urban and rural space by explaining that 'rural space is epitomized as 'natural', pure and tranquil and is therefore understood as being closer to nature than the sort of society which emerges in urban space.' Recent research conducted by Skår and Krogh (2009) in Norway states that children are much more likely to be engaged in structured play devised by adults even when it is in the countryside, in contrast to play devised and directed by children themselves. In essence it appears that, much play activity for children is structured by adults. Unscheduled activities, such as child led outdoor play are not as common as in the past (McKendrick et al. 2000; Valentine 2001; Furedi 2008). This is evidently related to the fears about children being out of their parent's sight and therefore potentially at risk.

**Risk and public space**

In contemporary Ireland, particularly with more families living in urban areas and the anxiety about children's safety in public spaces, there is less opportunity for children to create their own spaces, such as 'dens' and 'cubbies' (Valentine 2004).

Parents often need to negotiate boundaries to their children's mobility, in order to protect them from real or perceived danger. This means that children's outdoor play is instead substituted with privatised activities, piano lessons, tennis coaching, after school clubs (Valentine 2004). The public space around our homes has come to be an area of risk to children, there is extensive media coverage of tragic events involving children. For example as highlighted by the recent case in Athlone where two girls were lured away from a birthday party and raped by a stranger as reported in *The Irish Times* newspaper (2014). However despite cases like this happening Sheila Wayman for *The Irish Times* (2014) writes that this is an evil most parents will not encounter. Valentine (2004: 15) refers to this as 'terror talk' and suggests that this type of discourse helps to portray a 'geography of fear' in our locale. This media coverage 'may distort local fears by heightening parent's awareness of extreme and rare events causing them to restrict their children's use of space excessively' The effect of this heightened anxiety about children's safety in public spaces does have a direct effect according to Valentine (2004), 'paradoxically therefore, as peoples knowledge of the world expands, so their experiences of their local worlds contract' (Valentine 2004:15). This shrinking of horizons gives to a restriction of children's agency in public space. McNeish and Roberts (1995) use the metaphor that the majority of children are not 'free-range' but rather are 'battery reared' as they are much more restricted in their freedom. Additionally, modern parents are challenged with attempting to negotiate with their children about how far they can venture out away from home and at what age (Valentine and McKendrick 1997; McKendrick et al. 2000). Once again Valentine (2004:15) states that 'parents negotiate and establish the extent of their children's personal geographies according to their understandings of what restrictions a 'good parent' should impose on their youngsters' This management of boundaries is conducted on traditional lines, with Mother supervising and caring and Dad acting as the disciplinarian, dealing with infringements to rule breaking (Wood and Beck 1994). There is a popular perception that children's safety has deteriorated since they (the adults and parents) were young, many adults today claim to have had more freedom to play outside during their own childhood. 'Concern over children's safety has led to a retreat from the street to more privatised play spaces, the home, or institutional venues like leisure centres or after school clubs' (McKendrick et al. 2000; Valentine 2004:17). The challenge, therefore,

for researchers in this field is to continue to ask children their views on the spaces they occupy with their family lives and this is a key remit of the current study.

**Home**

While public space is relevant to children's lives, arguably the space of home is the most important. Douglas (1991) argues that the idea of home structures time and memory for family members through its ability to spatially organise the practices of individuals through such activities as household tasks and eating together. This can potentially be ruptured by relationship breakdown in families where the consequence is now that there are often two homes that the children may divide their time between. The essence of what home means may be very hard to capture but is nonetheless very important in people's lives. Putnam (1999: 144) explains it thus,

> Dwelling is at the core of how people situate themselves in the world. The boundary of the home is still the most culturally significant spatial demarcation and the way in which homemaking is elaborated through life stages provides key terms for ordering one's past present and future.

Home can be a site of work and a site of conflict, home is a material entity but also a social space. Valentine (2001:71) aptly describes the home as 'not only a physical location but also a matrix of social relations. It is the location where our routine everyday lives are played out'. Arguably in Ireland we also play out our lives in the family car, it can almost be conceptualised as an extension of the home. Urry (2007:112) states that we 'inhabit cars', he states that the car is the starting point for family mobility and profoundly affects how we view the world. Urry (2007: 117) goes on to state that car ownership for families is part of a 'car culture' that can denote what constitutes the 'good life'. A life of trips and holidays and visits to relatives, are part of the everyday life of many families but Urry (2007) also acknowledges that inhabiting cars can be restrictive and put demands on the drivers to taxi family members to their destinations. Theorising about space from public areas of space use to uses of space within the home to the addition of the car as an extension of family spaces serves to add to the complexity of time use for family units.

## Conclusion

The meaning of family time has been shaped by many forces, including, changing labour force participation by parents, especially mothers, rise and fall of the Celtic tiger, prevalence of technology in the home and the changing nature of space use. Routines are embedded within the social matrix of the wider community and society and thus shape families' lives (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Routines promote stability and well-being in the family group but can also be restrictive. Family routines structure the way that time is spent in the family and although this is such an intrinsic part of everyday life for families there is a comparative lack of in-depth study into the meaning of family routines for parents and for children especially.

Rituals also structure the nature of time in family life. They carry symbolic meaning for families and help create a sense of belonging and identity with past and future generations (Cheal 1988; Bennett et al. 1988). Rituals help construct shared memories between family members, although the nature of many popular rituals have become commercialised and as such can be a source of economic stress for families (Pleck 2000). Family rituals in general are under-researched, especially in regard to children's views on particular rituals that they enjoy such as Birthdays, Christmas and Halloween. In addition, children's views of religious occasions such as Holy Communions and Confirmations is area that is poorly researched.

Family space is negotiated by the members of the family, time and space ebb and flow in the home, especially with children's changing ages. Changes in the Irish economy in recent years have led to a change in the space and size of many homes, impacting upon the ways families use their space at home. Technology has changed our perception of space, where family members frequently occupy separate rooms in the house communicating with friends online rather than sharing face to face interaction with their family. Fear of risk to children if they venture far from home has curtailed children's' freedom in the last few decades making children's lives more home centred. Domestic space is not just physical, but is a place where meanings are jointly constructed between family members. Although there is a recent surge in interest in children's geographies as outlined within this review and supported by the works of James (1990) and Valentine (2001), there remains a significant gap in the research regarding an understanding of the experiences of

domestic time and space use by parents and children alike within the context of family life.

# Chapter 4 Methodology

## Introduction

Methodology is the spine of the research process. It serves to scaffold the story of the research journey, giving details of how and why the research was undertaken. Methodology can also be conceptualised as a series of choices made by a researcher in order to solve a research problem (Silverman and Marvasti 2008). 'Knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information' (Miles and Huberman 1994: 42). This research set out to explore how modern families spend time together and what this time together means to sense of family belonging and identity. Thus this required methodologies that would generate extensive qualitative data about the experiences of families and family lives. It was proposed, therefore, to adopt a qualitative methodology to draw on the experiences of a purposive sample of families.

It was considered that structured questionnaires in line with the quantitative tradition would not be the appropriate approach to capture the rich data that a family interview might generate. Therefore, in-depth interviews, with their unstructured and conversational style (Bryman 2008) were deemed to be the most appropriate form of enquiry to allow the participants to identify key issues and drive the research process in a safe and comfortable research atmosphere. Children and parents were invited to tell their stories of family life and how they spend their time together. The methodological tool used to explore time spent in families was therefore the family interview. Entire families were interviewed together, twelve families in total from the East and South East region of Ireland. The method of gaining access to families and the particular challenges in data gathering are explored in the chapter in order to give an insight into the often less documented processes of recruiting research participants. This particular research methodology; the family interview, is influenced by interpretivism, where meanings are interpreted in the interview analysis. Interpretivism is in turn influenced by the epistemological position of social constructionism (Burr 2003; Bryman 2008; Gergen 2009; Gray 2009). Social constructionism posits that meanings emerge within relationships and

communication and are historically and culturally specific. These concepts, interpretivism and social constructionism are invariably linked as very appropriate ways of understanding family interactions (Burr 2003).

Gray (2009) argues that all research is conducted against a particular backdrop of assumptions about the world and the nature of reality. This chapter will outline the ontological stance of the research from a relativist position. Following this the epistemology of social constructionism will be discussed. In addition, the research employed the contextual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1993) bioecological model of human development. This framework allows for families to be understood as interrelated and as situated within a community. This framework will be sketched and its relationship to the subject matter explained.

Listening to the voices of children was of key importance in this research (Greene and Hogan 2005). Furthermore, it was considered crucial to regard children as active agents in sociological research, facilitating them to contribute their views as to how families enjoy spending time together (Christensen et al. 2000; Corsaro 2005; James and James 2008). When working with children and families it is pivotal to consider the ethical implications of the family interview. The steps taken to ensure that all research participants were treated with respect to their privacy and well-being are outlined in the chapter. Particular ethical considerations need to be undertaken when interviewing children and these will be subsequently outlined within this chapter (Hill 2005; Department for children and youth affairs 2012).

The method of analysis undertaken within this research will also be discussed in this chapter. Due to the very large volume of data generated from the family interviews, the analysis involved a two-step process. Firstly, the family interviews were coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo 9. Secondly, this was followed by a more in depth method, thematic narrative analysis specifically as defined by Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008). Family narratives have a particular process of co-construction where layers of story are built upon between family members and it was considered that thematic narrative analysis would facilitate the uncovering of these layers. Particular interview skills will be explained, such as active listening and improvisation to illuminate the process of the family interview. Lastly, a number of limitations to the research process will be explored at

the end of the chapter. This chapter will use the first person throughout to compliment the subjective nature of the model of interviewing employed. In addition to this, the process of reflexivity is a key component of the methodological approach adopted. It is important, therefore to acknowledge oneself as the researcher within the research process.

## Ontology

According to Gray (2009:17) 'ontology is the study of being, that is the nature of existence'. Ontological issues are concerned with whether situations and events in our society are external to individuals and families or something that is in the process of becoming and emerging out of our everyday interaction. There are two major ontological positions, objectivism and constructionism. Western thought is influenced by these two contrasting ontological positions. According to Gray (2009) this is a legacy of Greek philosophers who debated the nature of reality. Heraclitus (*c*.535-*c* .475 BC) argued for a view of the world as changing and with emergent properties arising out of an unformed and chaotic world. This Heraclitean worldview could be conceptualised as an 'ontology of becoming'. In opposition to this view, Parmenides (*c*. 515- *c* .445 BC) believed that the world was comprised of concrete formed entities and that there exists a permanent and unchanging reality. These concrete objects can then be represented by symbols and language leading to the notion that the world can be accurately mirrored by language. This can be said to be an 'ontology of being' with a focus on end states rather than processes (Gray 2009). This 'ontology of being' has been the dominant influence in western thinking up until relatively recently, being challenged by the *becoming* ontology in the postmodern era (Chia 2002). Again according to Chia (2002) the 'ontology of being' is understood to have given rise to the epistemology of objectivism, which is very closely associated with the theoretical perspective known as positivism. The ontology of *becoming* has transformed into the epistemology of constructionism which is linked to the theoretical perspective known as interpretivism.

### Being and Becoming

The two ontologies, the 'ontology of being' and 'ontology of becoming' can be broadly mapped onto the concepts of realism and relativism respectively. Realism is

closely associated with a positivist objectivist epistemology and relativism is associated with a constructionist epistemology. Theorists in the realist tradition argue that there is a true reality external to ourselves, while proponents of the relativist argument claim that reality is contingent on our world view and is emergent (Burr 2003). However, it is argued that the situation is more complex than this. Burr (2003) and Gergen (2009) maintain that there is an on-going philosophical debate about the nature of truth that has its origins in antiquity. It is termed the realism-relativism debate. According to Burr (2003) the realist camp and relativist camp are not very clearly demarcated and there are many shades of 'relativisms' and 'realisms' and connections between them both. Some examples of these fuzzy boundaries between the two debates are that realists acknowledge the power of language to construct meanings in society like their relativist counterparts. And most theorists in the relativist tradition accept that despite the power of language to construct our understanding there are concrete objects and situations that can be measured and tested in a natural science way. This research takes take a position that truths are relative and are subject to interpretation by individuals, which links to the epistemology of social constructionism (Gergen 2009). The next section will outline more fully the epistemological position that this research takes and also considers the issue of truth vis a vis relativist accounts.

## Epistemology

'While ontology embodies understanding *what* is, epistemology tries to understand *what it means to know*. Epistemology provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate' (Gray 2009:17) and is therefore crucial to any methodological discussion. Positivism is an epistemology that is associated with methods that are used in natural science. With a positivist approach phenomena can be measured in an objective manner and laws can by generalised from experiments to large populations. The objective is to generate data which are reliable, valid and capable of being replicated under similar research conditions (Silverman 2006). Knowledge is deductive, that is to say experiments begin with a hypothesis which is then proved or disproved. The premise within positivism is that there is an objective truth 'out there', truth and reality become inexorably linked in this epistemological viewpoint.  Research is also considered

'value free' or neutral and not subjective in nature (Bryman 2008). In contrast to positivism, social constructionism is an epistemology that asserts that meaning is constructed rather than discovered by natural science methods. It can be argued that epistemology for social scientists is concerned with meaning as it pertains to social actors. The focus of study within the social sciences is very different to the focus of study within the natural sciences (Bryman 2008). An important facet which differentiates positivist perspectives from social constructionist perspectives is in regards to the methods used in research. Researchers in the positivist tradition utilise experiments, observation or structured interviews for example and these methods are linked to their belief in an unchanging objective reality (Gray 2009). Researchers from a constructionist tradition believe that reality is contingent and emergent and thus utilise a range of methods that reflect this, like ethnography or semi structured interviews (Silverman and Marvasti 2008; Gray 2009). A key question is whether interviews represent a straightforward truth or whether they merely reveal their own assumptions and underlying structures (Silverman 2009). 'Qualitative research is part of a debate, not a fixed truth' (Banister 2003:3). The focus in this study however is on interpretivist understanding versus positivist explanation. Social phenomena and their meanings are constantly being constructed, negotiated and revised; this applies not just to everyday talk, but also the process of research (Bryman 2008). This concept is also allied to Max Weber's (1947) concept of *Verstehen*, which means the empathetic understanding of human behaviour and is a useful way of theorising about the methodological approach undertaken within this research which is highly interpretive in nature.

**Social Constructionism**

The epistemological framework for this research is premised on the theory of social constructionism (Gergen 1985; 2009). The concept of social constructionism proposes that everything we know and understand is socially mediated; our realities are constructed and socially determined. Social constructionism demands that we take a critical look at taken-for- granted ways of understanding our lives (Burr 2003). According to social constructionism objective truths are not 'out there' waiting to be uncovered, rather, truths are negotiated between members in society on an on-going basis with much of this negotiation mediated through language. Social constructionism argues that as researchers we have to be mindful of our observations

and be wary of assumptions about the nature of reality. This is in opposition to the natural science methods of enquiry associated with positivism and empiricism, where reality exists and can be measured and observed consistently over time (Bryman 2008; Silverman and Marvasti 2008; Gray 2009) .

## The origins of social constructionism

Social constructionism has roots that go back to the birth of postmodernism and is based on a relativist ontology and a constructionist epistemology.

Definition of key elements in social constructionism as outlined in Burr (2003) adapted from Gergen (1985) include the following:

- A critical stance is taken towards taken-for-granted knowledge, it challenges the assumptions that society can be understood by observation alone, a view held by proponents of a positivist approach.

- Social constructions are historically and culturally specific. That is to say that the conceptualisations of notions such as childhood have changed over the centuries from what  the expectations of a child's life was like in the last century compared to a child in the western world today (Aries 1962; Cunningham 2006; Furedi 2008; Mayall 2010). Assumptions about 'good' parenting are again based on our history and culture.

- Knowledge is sustained by social processes, we construct knowledge together in our everyday interactions; working, shopping, and caring for loved ones. Language and discourse are very important for constructing concepts and understanding, for instance our knowledge of mental illness or dysfunctional families (Foucault 1972; Smart 2007).

- Knowledge and social action go together. Power relations are involved in knowledge production with dominant groups, medicine, and law, defining what it is permissible to do.

**Social Constructionism and discourse**

Discourses are 'practices which form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49). This statement expresses the relationship between the objects in our world and the world of subjective meanings.  This emphasis on the power of discourse outlines clearly the link between social constructionism and relativism, how we can only perceive truth and reality depending on our place in the world and our relationships with others. One of the key characteristics of the social constructionist perspective is that there is considered to be no separation between the individual and their social context. Language and discourse construct both social and individual realities. Mutual constructions emerge as a result of interactions between people, family members, co-workers and parent and child. 'A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr 2003:64). This may seem as though social constructionism regards that no external reality exists beyond the discourse but this is not so according to Foucault (1972)  who did not deny the materiality of objects in our world *rather* he postulated that our only means of understanding reality as it made sense to us was through the discourse. The discourse that we are enmeshed in constructs our understanding through language, even if it is a concrete object like a tree or abstract concepts like love, happiness, kindness (Burr 2003).

Gergen (1985) believes that language can be used to think about and conceptualise reality but like Foucault he believes there is a world of reality beyond the discourse. Therefore, we can assume that Gergen was not absolute in his view that the discourse represents everything and represents the only true way of 'seeing' the world around us. Gergen (2009) states that despite his conviction to a relativistic perspective that 'constructionism is not, then a candidate for truth. Nor is it a belief system. Rather the constructionist dialogues represent invitations to a way of understanding' (Gergen 2009:29). Furthermore Gergen (2009) argues for the existence of multiple realities. This concept fits well with the subject matter of studying family members with each member of the family experiencing the same event or occasion but having a different perspective or memory of it.

**Social constructionism and family relationships**

Social constructionism espouses a belief in the idea of a 'relational' and 'distributed' self (Wetherell and Maybin 2002). This is very pertinent to the task of researching families and family relationships where there are a multitude of voices, and where each individual is impacting upon the others and vice versa. One of the most basic human activities is conversations and social interactions, a great deal of our waking hours are taken up with this activity from dialogues to arguments to gossiping (Harré 1979). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) knowledge is derived from and maintained by social interaction. They also argue that conversation and interaction are understood by individuals because they have a shared perception of reality, so in effect the interaction reinforces that joint reality. The research into time that families spend together illustrates this theory very well in that family interactions and stories weave a shared reality and memory. As discussed earlier in this chapter another important tenet in social constructionism is the cultural and historical specifity of knowledge; how our perception of the world is dependent on our culture and history (Burr 2003). This is key to conceptualising how the roles of members of the family have changed over the last number of years, especially in relation to the nature of childhood and gender roles within the family. These changes have challenged the ideas of the stay-at-home mother and father as breadwinner. Lastly, within social constructionism, knowledge is sustained by social processes and the day to day interactions between people in society. Many shared practices and rituals within the family and family relationships produce knowledge and understanding specific to that family group. For example, a specific Birthday tradition, or Saturday morning routine may be particular to that family (Fiese 2006). This research aims to explore these meanings within families, how they sustain relations in their everyday existence and the significance of the construction of meaning within families in social research.

# Narrative

**Social constructionism and Narrative**

The method of analysis adopted for this study is that of narrative analysis– which refers to the systematic study of narrative data, (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Many

authors, such as Denzin (2001), Kohler Riessman (2008) and Gergen (2009) have argued that there has been a 'turn to narrative' in the social sciences in the last two decades away from the objectivity of positivism. However, narrative in many forms has been studied for centuries. A simple definition of a narrative drawn from the time of Aristotle in his *Poetics*: is a story with a beginning, middle, and an end (Leitch 1986; Elliott 2005).

Narrative analysis is a research method that comes under the umbrella of the interpretive perspective and the epistemology of social constructionism. It seeks to understand and explore meanings in an individual's dialogue and everyday communication. The social constructionist epistemology assumes that meaning is created jointly between people and that knowledge and understanding are emergent from their relationships. It stresses that joint action, conversation, dialogue, and conflict between individuals and in groups all give rise to meaning and understanding in social lives and personal worlds (Wetherell and Maybin 2002). This is relevant to children's experiences as well as adults whose lives are socially constructed but who are also significant agents in the social construction of their worlds. For example, exposure to and sharing in family stories helps children develop a coherent sense of themselves in their families and in their community (Wetherell and Maybin 2002; Fiese 2006). Bryman (2008: 696) provides a useful definition of narrative analysis.

> Narrative analysis is an approach to the elicitation and analysis of data that is sensitive to the sense of temporal sequence that people, as tellers of stories about their lives or events around them, detect in their lives and surrounding episode and inject in their accounts.

Narrative analysis as a method compliments and links well with the social constructionist epistemology. Meanings are situated within family contexts and emerge out of the conversations in the family group. This type of analysis facilitates this uncovering of meaning between members of the family (Daly 2007). Narrative analysis as a method was chosen over other methods as the intention was to elucidate as much meaning as possible from the accounts that the families gave in the interviews, children as well as adults. It was felt that using a positivist approach would not allow for the rich description and exploration of shared meanings to be uncovered. This research into family narratives seeks to identify common themes

from amongst the families interviewed in order to understand a particular cultural process (Bryman 2008). By cultural process we mean the shared understanding of symbols, ritual and language in a particular society or other group (Wetherell and Maybin 2002). Even though each family had its own unique stories, several common themes and motifs emerged from the data in the family interviews. Narrative is intrinsic to all our lives and as such we may take it for granted and rarely closely scrutinise these narratives in the frenetic pace of family life. The following quote aptly sums up some of the ways we use narrative in our daily lives and its key role in maintaining relationships.

> 'We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember , anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative'

> (Hardy 1968:73)

**Narrative as story**

The previous paragraph emphasises the importance of stories in the context of a child's experience. Gergen (2009:37) states that 'narrative is reality as story' and he goes on to state that in most societies, standards exist for narrative construction. One wants to hear a 'proper story', we expect to hear reality retold as a story, for instance a story about our birth or how our parents met. Gergen (2009) suggests that there are many types of narratives or 'story forms' that people employ in their daily lives. Each narrative has its own tempo and end point with ups and downs. Common ones include the 'happily ever after narrative' the 'heroic saga narrative' the 'tragedy' the comedy/romantic narrative often seen as the plot line in films. There are several elements that are necessary in any narrative for it to be considered a narrative.

Some criteria of well-formed narratives can be explored below: these are adapted from Gergen (2009:37) and Kohler Riessman (2008: 84).

- **A valued end point a punch line:** a triumph or eventual tragedy, the listeners are moved along to the climax of the tale being recounted.

- **Events relevant to the end point**: such as vivid and descriptive accounts but relevant details only, for example in court 'tell the whole truth and nothing

but the truth' is not actually what is wanted, rather a coherent ordered account.

- **Orientation:** location, time, key characters in the narrative.

- **Ordering of events:** we require the story to follow a structure if we are to comprehend it. Most narratives progress in a linear order in time, though there are variations.

- **Causal linkages:** 'explanation must be woven into the narrative tissue' (Ricoeur 1981:278) the audience needs to be made aware of relevant linkages that flesh out the story and add interest to the account.

- **Evaluation:** where the narrator steps away from the story momentarily in order to remark on the meaning in the plot and to emphasise the emotive points.

- **The coda:** tying up the ends of the story to resolve the account.

This structural model of narrative formation, is also espoused by Labov and Waletzky (1967), and Labov (1972, 1982). They argue that it is useful to understand the underlying structure of the narrative because it illuminates how different parts of the story intersect. This understanding of the structure of narrative is particularly helpful in order highlight the different voices within a family narrative. Labov and Waletsky (1967) use some key steps in understanding the structure of narratives. Beginning with, *the orientation,* where the listener provides information about the setting, followed by the *complicating action*, this refers to what happened next, then comes the *evaluation*, this is a synopsis of what the event means to the speaker, eventually we reach the *resolution,* and how the story ends.

**Narrative and the family**

Families create the story of their shared existence through favourite memories and traditions (Daly 2007). According to Vygotsky (1978) stories are collaborations, with the storyteller taking inspiration from familiar people who share the same cultural experience. Most people like telling stories and need little encouragement to do so and this forms the basis for the key research aim of understanding how

families enjoy spending time together (Fiese 2006). Narratives can contain information about appropriate ways of leading one's life, conducting relationships or particular ways of behaving (Wetherell and Maybin 2002). Stories can also have a cautionary note or moral to them (Bruner 1990), these accounts can serve to reinforce personal and cultural values and help individuals make sense of their lives. In this way, narrative analysis goes beyond individual story to generate new knowledge about complex human relationships shaped by cultural phenomena (Daly 2007). There may also be' legacy narratives' within a family (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) passed on between and within generations.

> 'The family's first concern is itself, but its second realm of concern is its relation to the world. Family stories about the world are usually teaching stories, telling members still at home the ways of the world according to the experiences its elders have had….Family stories seem to persist in importance even when people think of themselves individually, without regard to their familial roles. The particular human chain we're part of is central to our individual identity'

(Stone 1988:7)

In addition to the significance of narrative within families and family research, several authors have pointed to the importance of the position of 'listener' in narratives and the evaluative aspects of the narrative as a pivotal part of the co-construction of the story. (Gubrium and Holstein 1998, 2009; Mishler, 1986). Individuals may tell the story in a certain way; outlining the significant events. Subsequently these events can be agreed upon between the narrator and the listeners or argued against with revision for the reimagining of the story. This is a common occurrence in the telling and retelling of family stories. In this regard 'stories can be seen as joint actions' (Plummer 1995: 20). Furthermore, according to Yuval-Davis (2006) this joint retelling of family stories has another important function, it can promote a sense of family belongingness between the narrators.

As interviewers (listeners) we need to be sensitive to the fact that narrative accounts are only partial and that stories may be used as tools to present oneself in a particular way or alternatively to resist a particular label or identity. According to Goffman (1959) how the story is recounted to the audience is linked to the 'presentation of the self 'and 'impression management'. Conversational narratives afford opportunities

for self- continuity and provide a stable sense of self in the story as it is related to others in the dialogue (Wetherell and Maybin 2002). Narratives do not necessarily correspond with an essential truth, therefore the strength of the narrative is not how closely it adheres to the facts of the event but rather the way the story has been created, experienced and by whom it is told. Kohler Riessman (1993a: 4-5) states that narratives 'do not mirror a world out there' instead they are 'constructed, creatively authored, rhetorically replete with assumptions and interpretive'.

**Deconstructing the narrative**

Whether a narrative or story is truth or an interpretation, it is important that sociologists engage in a deconstruction of the narratives they are investigating in order to contribute to their research field. Deconstruction facilitates in depth data analysis of volumes of qualitative data. In the context of the present research, I deemed it useful as the researcher to consider some pertinent questions explored in the literature by Cortazzi (2001) and Kohler Riessman (1993a) to mention two. These questions are listed below.

- Who are the key storytellers?

- What is the main content of the story?

- How the story is told, what structure is used?

- What is the context/location of the story?

- What genre does the story have, a funny story, a cautionary tale or a unique pattern?

Added to these above questions I set out to analyse how the key players would reinforce or contradict each other's story or argument. Deconstruction of the narratives helped to analyse how stories developed within the family. It also illuminated the ways in which the stories were layered with narrative accounts emerging simultaneously from several members within the family at the same time in the course of the family interview.

Kohler Riesmann (1993a) points to the role of the researcher within the transcription and write up phases of research when she suggests that we (researchers) are still

deeply personally enmeshed in the meaning emerging from the data. The data from narrative interviews can be overwhelming in its volume as each family member tells his or her part of the story, some of the data can appear to be relatively mundane and some very meaningful (Squire et.al 2008). However, all of the data requires careful deconstruction and interpretation. There is no standard roadmap of exactly how to carry out narrative analysis, (Squire et.al 2008) although this study will be informed directly by Kohler Riessman's (2008) work on narrative analysis. 'In constructing a transcript, we do not stand outside in a neutral objective position, merely presenting what was said. Rather, investigators are implicated at every step along the way in constituting the narratives we then analyse' (Kohler Riessman 2008:28) Each family within this research interprets the questions in the interview in particular ways and events are selected and organised to represent a coherent story of the time spent together (Kohler Riessman 2008). Furthermore, how each family member's contribution is represented is chosen by the researcher, we offer our own subjective interpretation of the families' narratives. New knowledge is created when narratives are deconstructed and then interpreted and evaluated. This is involves and acknowledgement of the deeply subjective nature of narrative analysis and the presence of the researcher in the creation of that knowledge.

## Children's Voices

In the context of this study as a whole but more importantly from a methodological standpoint children are regarded as competent social actors able to reflect on their lives in a family. Their accounts are considered as valid in this research as the adults' accounts (Prout and James 1990; Corsaro 2005; James and James 2008; Mayall 2010). This concept of equality in children's participation is reiterated in recent Irish research involving children (Greene and Hogan 2005; Hill 2005) and (*Growing Up in Ireland Survey* 2009, 2011). Current literature and research involving children has begun to regard children as competent participants in research projects and there has been a shift in viewing children as subjects rather than objects in research (Christensen and James 2000; Woodhead and Faulkner 2008; Greene and Hogan 2005) and the Children's Ombudsman (2004) have all supported this undertaking to give children a voice in their own right. At the time of the write up there is a key change in legislation regarding children's rights with the proposed amendment to the

Irish constitution in November 2012. According to Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald 'This amendment proposes to include a new article in our Constitution, article 42A, titled 'Children', which will greatly inform the courts' consideration of the legal framework for decision-making regarding children' (Irish Times 2012). This movement towards including children's voices in policy and legal provision has created a new demand to find ways of eliciting and understanding children's narratives. Engel (2005:199) states 'that children's narratives are explored for the insight into children's experience of their worlds. The concept that children will tell us about their thoughts and experiences has gone out of fashion' For this research children's narratives are very valuable in elucidating underlying meanings inherent in children's experiences of time spent with their family. Children are situated within their families, and families are situated within communities and societal and historical contexts. Given the centrality of this to discourse of family research, the next section of this chapter outlines a framework for understanding the embedded nature of family life.

## Contextual framework

### Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

The conceptual framework of this research will draw on the child's relationship to the world as outlined by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), known as the Bioecological model. This model has a focus on the developing person in the ecological system. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) description there are four interrelated components to his model.

### The Process-Person-Context-Time or (PPCT) Model.

a) The developmental process, involving the fused and dynamic relation of the individual and the context.

b) The *person*, with his or her individual repertoire of biological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural characteristics

c) The *context* of human development, conceptualised as the nested levels or systems, of the ecology of human development he has depicted (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

d) *Time,* conceptualised as involving the multiple dimensions of temporality, for example, ontogenetic time, family time, and historical time- constituting the chronosystem that moderates change across the life course. (Bronfenbrenner 2005: XV).

It is this conceptualisation of family life situated in a particular time, specifically time spent together that is of interest in this study. Children and parents and other relatives such as aunts, were interviewed within their family contexts in the naturalistic setting of the home, in order to privilege the ordinary events of everyday life. It is expected that the outcomes of this research will provide very valuable insight by showing the family narratives embedded in the lived moments of everyday, their negotiation of time and of spatial boundaries and the meanings created between them. Children's lives are experienced within the context of their immediate family, wider family, peers and community, therefore, using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model is appropriate for this research. While the bioecological model is not a new conceptual framework it is central to framing family life.

The family exists within specific communities, within specific routines and rituals that are in turn connected with the wider socio-political community. These are the interconnected systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. Furthermore, the family is situated within even wider social networks that have come to prominence especially in the last decade with greater connectivity to the World Wide Web. Families experience what Held (2004: 14) defines as 'stretched social relations' where families can spend considerable amounts of time on social networking sites and using computer applications such as Skype to keep in touch with friends and family on the other side of the globe.

Another key point to consider for this research was the need to avoid abstracting conversations from their natural settings or contexts, rather, to see each conversation as emerging and relevant to the context as a developing process. The narratives that emerged from the family interviews overlapped with each other and created a co-

constructed circle of understanding between the family members. This attention to developing processes and constructions is very pertinent in sociology and emerging social science research (Dunn 2005; Hogan et al 1999; Hogan 2005; Westcott and Littleton 2005). Given, therefore, that a key objective of this study is to capture the effects and influences that family members have upon on each other, on their mutual development as a unit and including the bonds that unite them, I was adamant as the researcher not to abstract the narratives from their context.

A portrait is beginning to emerge of the developing person as fused with the family and social context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the developing person is influenced by many factors in the bioecological system and in particular by their parents/carers. However, in later work Bronfenbrenner (2005), clearly influenced by Vygotsky (1978) proposed that in fact parents themselves are profoundly shaped by the development and actions of their children in a mutual dialectic of influence. So, it can be clearly argued that family members all have effects on each other's biopsychosocial development. This phenomenon is of key interest to this research as it seeks to explore the shared influences between family members. It is aptly summed up by Bronfenbrenner (2001:696).

> Within the bioecological theory, development is defined as the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychosocial characteristics of human beings both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends over the life course across successive generations through historical time, both past and present.

## Ethical Issues

The research was carried out according to the procedures for ethics committee approval set down by Waterford Institute of Technology and the research proposal was recommended after detailed examination by the board of the Ethics .In addition, the research was carried out in accordance with guidelines for ethics in research by the Sociological Association of Ireland and the Psychological Society of Ireland. Gatekeepers were used in the research process in order to maintain appropriate safeguards when working with families and children.

The research was conducted according to the principles of **avoidance of harm, integrity, respect, responsibility** and **justice** at all stages towards the participating families (Bryman 2008). This was especially important when working with children

and with multicultural families that great sensitivity and respect were observed at all times. This aspect will be considered in greater detail in the next section.

Firstly, it was anticipated that no harm would come to the participating families as they were being interviewed with their consent at a safe location, their home or mine. Secondly, the participants were treated with integrity and respect by requesting their full consent to participate in the research. Full consent was attained for the recording and transcription of the family interviews, including the consent of the children. Confidentiality was assured by explaining to the participant families on completion of the research all sound files would be destroyed and all possible identifying characteristics of research subjects changed in the write-up to preserve anonymity. Sound ethical practice governing the inclusion of children in non-medical research has received very little attention until recently (Hill, 2005). However it was not envisaged that this study would cause distress to children or parents however in recognition of the nature of this study and the possible vulnerability of respondents in discussing family dynamics interviews were conducted at a venue of their choice, either in their own homes or in a neutral setting. A participation consent form was explained to all participants including the children (see Appendix D). A special child friendly participation consent form was designed for the study (see Appendix E). I explained the details of the consent form to each family member who participated in the research paying particular attention to the children, as clear age appropriate explanation is very important (Hill 2005).

In order to ensure respect and dignity for the age of the children time was built into the process to allow children to ask questions about the study and their part in it prior to the interview. Many of the children did ask relevant questions relating to the research and this informed the management of later interviews, for instance children were keen to know if they could take a break or play with toys during the interview. Hill (2005) argues that for consent to be valid, it must be 'appropriately informed' and suggests that children should be informed of the following: the aim of the research; the time commitment involved; who will have access to results; whether the researchers will provide feedback; whether confidentiality will be guaranteed.

All possible ethical issues were considered at all stages of the research and the practice of process consent was used throughout where interviewees were informed

that they could withdraw consent and participation at any time before, during or after the interview (Hill 2005; Bryman 2008; Department for children and youth affairs 2012).

**Ethics in a multicultural setting**

The families that were interviewed were from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds although most were born in Ireland. Two of the families were Muslims, one family from Pakistan and one from Saudi Arabia originally. Both families had been living and working in Ireland for several years. As I did not have a great of knowledge about Muslim family traditions prior to carrying out the interviews I did some research beforehand in order to familiarise myself with some key Muslim customs and practices in order to be as respectful as possible. My aim was to practice culturally responsive interviewing as proposed by Vazquez -Montilla (2000) aiming to be as sensitive as possible to cultural differences during the interview. For instance, taking care to be appropriately dressed when conducting the interviews and removing my shoes when entering the home. Vazquez -Montilla (2000) suggests that multicultural interviews should ideally be conducted to a 'Triple A' (AAA) standard; authenticity, affinity and accuracy. Authenticity means matching the culture of the interviewer and interviewee, a situation that was not possible in this case as I am from a different cultural background, so it was important to strive to achieve the other two standards, affinity and accuracy during the interviews. Affinity means gaining knowledge of the interviewees' culture and community, this was achieved with some background reading but mostly with help of a gatekeeper 'Cala' a Muslim woman who informed me about appropriate ways to interact during the interview. Cala had explained also that when entering a Muslim home for a visit it is tradition to eat any food that is offered and that is polite to accept this offering, indeed this proved to be the case with both Muslim families.

To achieve accuracy I asked the families quite a few background questions before the interview started, mostly about traditional ceremonies like the Haj and Ramadan and the type of food that is eaten at these times. The children were particularly eager to explain these details to me, like how there are two festivals called Eid, Eid –ul-adha which marks the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, the 'Hajj' when traditionally lamb and sweet treats are eaten. Also a second Eid, Eid –al-fitr which

marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan and again the celebrations again focus on sweets. The two young girls in the second Muslim family also explained the traditional clothes they wear for special occasions. I made notes on these details which helped in the analysis of the interview transcript later.

At times I did feel under pressure trying to make sure that I acted as respectfully as possible, any illusion of complete control over the interview process is gone once you enter a family's home and this fact is accentuated when the interview is out of you own culture. I learned that I had to be content with the direction the interview took even when it felt as though it was going very off topic. Notwithstanding it yielded up some very interesting data and was very enriching. Power relations between the researcher and the researched poses another ethical dilemma in this type of research with families and demanded a high level of personal reflexivity before during and after the interviews in order to ameliorate its impact. The concept of reflexivity will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

## Sample of Families

It is important to justify the sample of families studied herein by stating that this study has taken a broad definition of what constitutes a family in modern Ireland. This refers to married, cohabiting, step parents and single parents, families with school going children between the ages of 4 and 17 years old and families with young children who live in one family home or spend time being cared for in shared parenting arrangements. In the initial phase of the project 12 families were interviewed, 42 adults and children in total. Given the changing makeup of the Irish population with 10per cent of the total population is now made up of migrants and ethnic minorities (Central Statistics Office 2007, 2012), this study sought to purposively include a reflective sample of families where either parent is of non-Irish origin, in addition to the traditional mix of families from rural and urban settings and different social class backgrounds.

The sample consisted of twelve families. All families had at least one child living in the family home. Some families offered to participate in the study but were excluded because it was considered that the children were too young to meaningfully engage in the interview process. Families were sought for the project through posters, (see

Appendix F) that were displayed in schools and churches in the Waterford City and County and the South Kilkenny area. Local radio was also used to explain the research project and to recruit interested families. A pilot focus group was set up in the early stages of the recruitment process to guide the development of the topic guide that was eventually used for the family interviews (please see Appendix B).

**Schedule and time frame of interviews**

The interviews spanned a timeframe from September 2009 to March 2010. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter it was challenging to recruit whole families to volunteer for interview. Several families initially agreed to be interviewed but on follow up were not interested. With busy families, parents' work schedules and school, homework and after school activities for the children, reaching a time that suited everybody was difficult to achieve. The whole process from the original contact to actual interview could take weeks to complete with several phone calls and emails to plan the interview. Sensitivity was required to maintain contact with the families without pressuring them to agree to a date for interview.

A letter was sent to a number of agencies such as schools that might provide gatekeepers, (see Appendix C). Two gatekeepers, Jacqui and Cala assisted with recruiting and communicating with the participants. According to Gray (2009: 508) 'a gatekeeper is 'someone who is able to grant or refuse access to the '*field',* the field is the setting where the research takes place. Gatekeepers are essential to ensure that research is ethical especially when seeking access to vulnerable groups such as children and families (Hill 2005; Corsaro and Molinari 2008). Early on in the data gathering phase I had the opportunity to access a small group of parents organised by a gatekeeper, Jacqui who was a home school liaison teacher at a primary school in an economically disadvantaged area of Waterford City.

Heptinstall (2000) states that without the support of a gatekeeper it can be very difficult to access participants for research, especially children. Without Jacqui's help I would not have been able to access this group, and hence could not have carried out the pilot focus group which proved to be a very important in the research process. It generated many ideas and concepts which enhanced the family interviews and added to the validity of the research design (Bryman 2008). According to Gray (2009), gatekeepers are also of utmost importance when seeking access to

participants of different ethnic minorities, this too was relevant to this research. I had the support of Cala, a Muslim woman who helped me gain access to two Muslim families who were interviewed. Again, this support was crucial in making contact with the families.

The table overleaf gives a brief overview of the families who participated.

*The asterisks in the table denote some family members who were not present for the interview, for example, some fathers and some adult children in the family.*

| Family | Marital Status | Mother | Father | No. of Children | Children Names and Ages |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| O' Brien | Married/separated | Jennifer 35-40 | John * 40-45 | 3 | Jill aged 12<br>Adam aged 8<br>Amy aged 8 |
| Giles | Married | Margaret 35-40 | J.P 40-45 | 2 | Kirstie aged 9<br>Lily aged 6 |
| Golden | Married | Annika 30-45 | Brendan 30-35 | 2 | Isla aged 6<br>Milly aged 3 |
| Lawlor | Divorced*children from second brief relationship | Mandy 35-40 | | 2 ( twins) | Ali aged 5<br>Grace aged 5 |
| Barrett | Married | Agnes 35-40 | Joseph 40-45 | 2 | Erin aged 7<br>Rebecca aged 4 |
| Ahmed | Married | Sabina 40-45 | Abdul 45-50 | 2 | Halim aged 17<br>Hanif aged 9<br>*Aunt Cala lives in the household also aged 30-35 |
| Arshad | Married | Amina 25-30 | n/a | 2 | Farah aged 5<br>Razia aged 4 |
| Walsh | Single | Sharon 30-35 | n/a | 1 | Jeff aged 10 |
| Shee | Married/separated | Monica 30-35 | n/a | 1 | Louisa aged 5 |
| Keyes | Married | Martha 40-45 | Donal* 45-50 | 3 | Mairead aged 12<br>Oisin aged 9<br>Aoife aged 5 |
| Maguire | Married | Harriet 45-50 | James * 50-55 | 4 | Sarah aged 23*<br>Shane aged 20*<br>Bradley aged 17<br>Elaine aged14 |
| Hanlon | Married | Ursula 35-40 | Bill 40-45 | 4 | Sile aged 13<br>Sorcha aged 11<br>Heidi aged 9<br>Ciara aged 5 |

*Figure 2*

## Demographics

At the outset of the interview some demographic information was sought from the participants (see Appendix G). This asked the participants (including the children) their age bracket, religion and occupation. It also had a section at the end for further suggestions and feedback. Nine of the families were based in the South East of Ireland in the Munster region. Three of the families were from the east coast, Leinster region. The families were a mixture of urban and rural; five families lived in rural areas and seven families lived in urban areas. Most of the individuals were born in Ireland though one Mother was born in Sweden but was married to an Irish man. Two families were Muslim, one from Pakistan originally and one from Saudi Arabia. A number of the families had experienced marriage separation, three of the mothers interviewed were married previously and were now separated but with varying amounts of contact with the father of the children. One mother in the research, was never married and is separated from her son's father however her son has frequent contact with his father.

## Pilot focus group and generating ideas

The purpose of doing a pilot focus group was to enhance and refine the methodological tool- the family interview. In an addition to this aim I wanted to recruit families from as wide an economic background as possible for the research. I sought the help of a gatekeeper who worked as a home school liaison at a city school that was deemed economically disadvantaged and as such was part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Through the efforts of this gatekeeper, I was able to meet a group of parents whose children went to this DEIS school. My gatekeeper put up several of my posters and organised for me to be introduced to the parents to explain my research. The group met on the school's premises and consisted of four mothers of junior infant boys in the school, although three of the mothers also had other older and younger children. I facilitated a group discussion about spending time together as a family and the group were enthusiastic and participated fully in speaking about many of the themes of the research project. Many ideas came up in the discussion. We spoke generally about children's birthday parties, spending time with children and compensating children out of guilt because of the pressures of work and therefore not being able to spend as much time with the

children as we would like to. As the discussion wound up I invited the mothers present to take part with their families in a follow up in depth interview, I also asked them to spread the word to their friends. However none of the mother's volunteered and I didn't get access any families from the group which was disheartening.

However, the discussion with the focus group provided some very valuable and thought provoking insights which guided the choice of topics for the eventual production of the semi structured questionnaire.

## Rationale for choice of interview questions

The variety of ways in which families can spend time together emerged very strongly as a theme. From the discussions with the pilot group I decided to have a variety of open ended questions relating to the way the family spend time together and where they spend it. These topics were then broken down further into; the space that the family use, inside the house, the garden, and to what extent the children play together. How far the children are allowed to go from home alone was a topic which prompted a question on the interview topic list. Play in general was a theme that I felt was essential for the interviews together with the families' use of technology.

Everyday routines were a theme that came up in the focus group discussion, mealtimes in particular, how the routine may be different on the weekends than during the working week and again different in the school holidays. I wanted to have a reflexive section to the interview also in order to ask parents in particular about changing family traditions, for example expectations about the celebration of birthdays today versus birthday celebrations a generation ago. Another issue that arose in the conversation with the pilot group was the amount of time spent travelling in the car with children and so I prepared a number of questions about whether families felt this was a fun or frustrating activity. Owning a pet was a topic I felt that many families could relate to and so this became a question and one I hoped would encourage children to speak freely. I considered that some questions would have to be phrased differently for parents and children. This consideration was reflected in the following question directed to parents; 'Do you think you have enough time to spend together as a family?' However, for the children, a similar but not identical question read as follows; 'What is the most important thing about

spending time with the family?' was deemed appropriate. The final question proposed for the topic guide was intended to be as open as possible to facilitate as open a narrative as possible. It read 'would you like to add anything else about spending time together?' The full interview topic guide is in Appendix B.

## Family Interviews

### The family interview as a research tool

Interviewing the family as a *unit* is relatively uncommon, there is comparatively little literature published on the subject. The present research is therefore significantly placed to contribute to this discourse. Family members have been interviewed in previous research, (Maunther et al 2000; Wright 2003; Gabb 2004, 2008) however this research focus is mainly on one family member at a time. Further research has been carried out with families using a variety of methods, from the use of observation as a method of study for the children and structured and semi structured interviews with the parents (Gabb 2008, 2004). The present research focuses on the family as a group, whether a Mum, Dad and children or a single parent and child/children. The interview situation of all the family together is broadly similar in practice to a focus group so this allows for multiple voices to be heard at once. This study aims to explore the co-construction of meanings between the family members in conversation; linking strands of the narrative which will later be analysed. The families are in a conversational circle, which creates a wealth of data regarding the lives of parents and children in families in post 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland. During the interview families tell stories about particular events and traditions as prompted by the topic guide devised by the researcher. Each family gives a particular account of themselves to achieve certain ends, parents may use a story to establish values that they regard as important and to teach the children about their experience of the world (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Children may use a narrative to shape their identity and personal agency within the family group, telling stories about how they handled a particular situation differently to a sibling (Squire 2008).

**Family interviews as a design model and research tool**

Qualitative semi structured interviews were chosen as the tool to elucidate as much information as was feasible from the family unit. Carrying out qualitative interviews successfully can be challenging and according to Burman (1994: 4) 'conducting interviews is a complex, labour intensive and uncertain business fraught with tricky issues'. A guide to conceptualising semi structured interviews is offered by Wengraf (2006: 3)

- The interview is a research interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge.
- It is a special type of conversational interaction: in some ways it is like other conversations, but it has special features which need to be understood.

- It has to be planned and prepared for like other forms of research activity but what is planned is a deliberate half scripted or quarter-scripted interview: its questions are only partially prepared in advance (semi-structured) and will therefore be largely improvised by you as interviewer. But only largely: the interview as a whole is a joint production, a co-production, by you and your interviewee.

Face to face interviews promote an exploration of meanings that are too complex for a structured questionnaire that is designed to have its answers quantified (Burman 1994). Semi structured interviews also afford a flexible and open ended design which allows for topics to come up during the interview that were not as yet anticipated by the researcher. According to Burman (1994) an interview is a conversation with a specific aim; a conversation that it is anticipated will produce interesting data. The order of questions may vary from interview to interview and all of the proposed questions or topics may not be covered at each interview (Gray 2009). A closed conceptual framework can block creativity so it is important to remain open minded (Bryman 2008).  Wengraf (2006: 5) states that to be successful, semi structured interviews require a great deal of preparation beforehand and an abundance of discipline and creativity during the interview. They also require greater time commitment in the interpretation and analysis time phases. Overall qualitative research interviewing can be relatively arduous but extremely worthwhile where

'semi structured interviews are 'high preparation, high risk, high gain and high analysis operations' (Wengraf 2006: 5).

Interview responses can be unexpected and represent only a partial truth. According to Wengraf (2006) when certain topics are discussed the interviewee has the opportunity to choose events or stories to focus on. We can only speculate as to why a particular narrative event is focussed on rather than others, so possibly, responses may be seen as partial and particular to the interviewee at the time of the interview. In essence, interview responses in semi structured interviews might be considered as 'an official story about the subjective world and the strategy of the informant' (Wengraf 2006:27).

## Considerations for interviewing children

Dunn and Hughes (1998), state that we can ask children as young as four years old directly about their experiences, their interests, play activities and their family and friends. This adds very valuable insight into the reporting of children's experience of family time. According to Westcott and Littleton (2005) however, interviewing children is not that straightforward. In fact it can be fraught with particular difficulties, including gaining ethical access to children, negotiating with gatekeepers and power imbalances which all make for a potential minefield of difficulties to be overcome (Hill 2005). Hill (2005) further claims that children are vulnerable to persuasion by adults as children are also keen to please and want to answer questions in the 'right way' so we need to be aware of this as researchers. With regard to the process of interviewing children, Westcott and Littleton (2005) argue for a co-constructive process of making meaning during the interview, that the interviewer and child come to a place of shared understanding around a topic or a story. They also emphasise the importance of building trust when interviewing children and stress that this is key to meaning making with the children. Wade and Westcott (1997) have shown that children value and enjoy humour in the interview situation, where a shared joke can be an acknowledgement of shared understanding.

**Validity of the interview as a research tool**

Assumptions structure all research (Burman 1994) and we need to strive to recognise and take account of these assumptions. This links to the epistemological position of the research project that we, as researchers are all subject to our own world view. We need to adopt a reflexive position and be aware of our own biases and judgements (Bryman 2008; Silverman and Marvasti 2008). Validity means that a research tool measures what it is designed to measure, in the situation where semi structured interviews are used validity can be achieved by making sure that the interview questions directly link to the aims and objectives of the research (Bryman 2008; Gray 2009).

Validity is reinforced by:

- Using interview techniques that build rapport and trust, thus giving informants the scope to express themselves.

- Prompting informants to illustrate and expand on their initial responses.

- Ensuring that the interview process is sufficiently long for subjects to be explored in depth.

- Constructing interviewing schedules that contain questions drawn from the literature and from pilot work with respondents. (Arksey and Knight 1999: 375)

In view of the above discussion of the validity of the family interview I made a decision to sketch the significance of space and place for each family. At the end of each family interview I sketched a map of the family home to try to understand the relative importance of spaces and place for each family. I kept a reflexive research journal specifically for this purpose (see Appendix H for an excerpt). These details helped me to remember not only the feel of the interview for me as the researchers which is part of the reflection process but it helped validate the choice of interview tool for the research aims. In addition after each interview contemporaneous notes were written to cover the sense of being at the interview with the family. These notes helped to anchor me at various points in the process, giving me an opportunity to log my feelings and observations that went beyond what had been recorded on the digital voice recorder. This reflective practice is essential to the process of conducting valid and ethical research practices. Gray (2009) suggests that it is vital to make notes as

quickly as possible after the interview to capture facts that were discussed before and after the interview but not recorded on the digital voice recorder. Bryman (2008) states that there is an ethical dimension to making notes on an interviewee's post interview remarks and he suggests that one possible way of dealing with this issue is to ask permission to use data from your post interview notes. I asked each family that gave me an unsolicited account their permission to use this off the record data at the write up of the research and each family agreed to my request. This note taking can be time consuming but is usually very worthwhile in terms of enhancing the data gathering process (Gray 2009). From the pilot interview onward I began making extensive notes in the immediate aftermath of the interview. These notes acted as a summary and an overview of the completed interviews, they helped to identify key themes and discussions that arose during the course of the interview as well as providing a context for the gathering of the data.

## Transcription

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the families' permission. Each family interview took approximately sixty minutes some were a little shorter and some were almost ninety minutes long. Patton (2002) states that in seeking to create the greatest possible validity in the research process what the interviewees say during the interview needs to be transcribed as fully and accurately as possible. After each interview the interview was uploaded from the digital voice recorder on to a laptop and encrypted. Next the interviews were put through 'WAVEPAD' software for editing purposes. At this stage the interviews were reviewed and in some cases some editing was done. Due to the nature of the interviews with young children involved, some of the sound quality in parts of the interviews was too compromised to making transcribing possible, laughing or loud or very soft conversation. Fortunately this only constituted a very small part of the total audio recording. My accompanying notes were crucial to add context when there was a noisy part of the audio file, I usually made a note during the interview if there was a part in the interview where I felt the final sound quality of the interview may be poor. In one interview with a Muslim family after fifteen minutes of the recording some of the family members started speaking in Arabic so this could not be transcribed as I did not have the requisite language skills. My notes here helped me place what was being said at the

time, one member of the family, the eldest son was reciting the Qur'an at his father's request. All of the remaining audio files family interviews were fully transcribed. Please see Appendix I for a sample of the interview transcript.

## Analysis

### Initial Coding of the family interviews

Although the key research aim was to uncover the co-construction of narrative in the family interviews, due to very large volume of data that was gathered, I decided to code the interviews first by using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package NVivo 9. This allowed for large amounts of text to be coded into themes and subsequently I could closely focus on much smaller units of analysis in order to use thematic narrative analysis. There are many advantages to using this method as it aids in the organisation of a very large amount of data, allowing for the data to be worked through systematically and coded (Gray 2009). A large volume of data can also be coded and analysed quite quickly once the researcher is familiar with the software (Silverman 2013). CAQDAS also allows data to be manipulated and reorganised and for notes to be made throughout the body of the work. Using CAQDAS can be a very creative and iterative process with codes being recoded later when an interesting direction is discovered (Richards 2002).

Overall CAQDAS can provide an audit of the data analysis in its entirety, something that may be difficult to achieve manually with a large volume of data therefore, using NVivo 9 can ensure a good level of dependability by a careful auditing process and complete record keeping of all the research phases. This is very important as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest credibility and dependability as the key quality control measures of qualitative research. Using CAQDAS can improve rigour chiefly because of its ability to count instances of phenomena, a feature which is particularly important in large volumes of data as in the case with family interviews (Silverman 2013). It is an excellent tool for locating what each interviewee said during the interviews which can be very helpful for reference at later stages of analysis. Additionally it can highlight the regularity of a theme and this can be represented through models. However it has some limitations in terms of analysis, the data can be analysed very widely but not very deeply. In order to relate themes to each other

or to understanding the context and meaning of what the interviewees say an additional layer of analysis needs to be undertaken. In addition, Holloway and Jefferson (2007) caution that computerised methods cannot take the place of human intuition and judgement in relation to coding of research data. Pivotally for this research the nuanced exchanges between speakers and the co-construction of narrative cannot be elucidated through CAQDAS alone. Although consistent and accurate in its grouping of data it cannot provide the codes these must be created by the researcher as Welsh (2002:6) points out.

> At this point it is useful to think of the qualitative research project as a rich tapestry. The software is the loom that facilitates the knitting together of the tapestry, but the loom cannot determine the final picture on the tapestry. It can though, through its advanced technology, speed up the process of producing the tapestry and it may also limit the weaver's errors, but for the weaver to succeed in making the tapestry she or he needs to have an overview of what she or he is trying to produce.

Furthermore using CAQDAS takes a considerable investment in time to learn how to use many of its functions effectively, taking six months to become accustomed to it possibilities and to input and code the data. There is a risk at the early stages of using the software of coding as an end itself rather than concentrating on the research aims as related to the code (Richards 2002). For optimal results using CAQDAS in combination with manual coding is arguably the best way to analyse large quantities of data (Gray 2009). This method also worked very well in terms of creating broad themes in the data which are outlined in the next chapter. However it is a very surface level of analysis, not allowing for more meaningful and nuanced understanding of family interaction. The next phase of the analysis required detailed study of the family stories, so narrative thematic analysis was chosen.

**Co- construction of narrative and its relevance to understanding family life**

This method was chosen in order to best access the meanings created between people in family contexts. In this research there is an emphasis on analysing the co-construction of narrative between the family members during the interviews. In addition focus was placed on the co-construction of meaning between the interviewer and the interviewees (Mishler 1986; Daly 2007; Kohler Riessmann 2008; Squire et al. 2008). Thematic narrative analysis was chosen as the best method of analysis in order to access the family practices and complex exchanges between family members. Long stretches of narrative conversation or family stories are

analysed line by line in order to illuminate their deeper meanings. These stories are dialogically constructed where according to Bakhtin (1981) each speaker plays his or her part and each person plays a vital role in the dialogue. In a qualitative interview we are not asking a passive interviewee standardised questions rather we are jointly constructing meaning as active participants' together (Mishler 1986; Kohler Riessman 2008). In the family interviews conducted within this research there was joint construction between myself as the researcher and each of the family members who were present, creating a complex construction of meaning between all those involved. In many ways the family interview could be conceptualised as a hybrid of a focus group but with a narrative basis. This format allowed for layers of topics to be to be built up by degrees by the various members of the family, whereby several family stories emerged during each family interview. Narrative analysis facilitates the uncovering of tiny details, nuances and moments of intimacy in shared conversations that feature in everyday life of families but one aspect that is rarely illuminated. Family relations and practices are frequently marked by conflict and negotiation as well as emotional closeness, these aspects are also uncovered by using narrative analysis, arguably this adds greatly to our understanding of family life per se.

Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests that during the interview the researcher needs to try to promote extended narrative from the respondent. An extended narrative is a sustained story telling episode that is rich in detail and information and is central to exploring shared meanings within the family in the analysis phase (Kohler Riessman 2008). This task requires skill and patience and a willingness to give up perceived control of the interview. This is inherently linked with the concept of power which will be discussed later in the chapter. Another important skill in qualitative narrative interviewing in families is the ability to maintain sustained emotional attentiveness and engagement with what the interviewees are saying. Stories emerge at unexpected times during the course of the interview and attentiveness will generally be rewarded with some thought provoking piece of information. Kohler Riessman (2008:28) also stresses that in order to make the most of the interviewee's 'narrative impulse' the interviewer needs to follow the tale being told very patiently even if it feels like a digression from the topic. For example a child may start to talk about a past event like the dog running across the road and getting run over and injured but the current

topic is something entirely different, the topic of pets having been discussed earlier. The child has just remembered the tale now and wants to talk about it. This reminds us that stories can be triggered by the slightest link or prompt during the interview often bringing forth the best narratives (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). This calls for particular research skills which will be explored in subsequent sections of this chapter.

**How the narrative thematic analysis was carried out.**

After the initial coding of the interviews using NVivo 9, thematic narrative analysis based on the method of Kohler Riessman (1993a; 2008) was used to analyse the interviews further. This entailed in-depth analysis of the conversations as they emerged from the data. Within this model the conversation was deconstructed and the layers of co-conversation was analysed. The co-construction and inherent scaffolding of the narratives of all family members involved in the various narrative segments were uncovered and highlighted. Kohler Riessman's (1993a; 2008) method specifically helps to frame the relationship between people and illuminates how each person dialogically co-constructs the joint narratives. In Kohler Riessman's form of analysis the content of the family story is the focus of the research rather than the emphasis being on structure of the narrative. This approach is somewhat akin to grounded theory although the stories remain intact rather than being broken down exclusively by the theme (Kohler Riessman 2008).The focus is potentially on 'what' is said rather than 'why is it said' or 'how it is said'. Narrative analysis allows for the relationships and interactions between people to be highlighted vividly and this adds greatly to our understanding of family practices. In addition, affection and emotional closeness and family responsibilities can be revealed in small moments.

Using this method of line by line analysis revealed a great deal of rich detail however at times I felt that there were some aspects to the family narrative that I was not able to touch upon. In listening back to transcripts I realised that similar events in family narratives could mean different things to different people. I needed to understand how the story was organised in order to get a getter a deeper sense of what was happening. This required close attention to how narrative was structured. For these instances I drew on the work of Labov (1972) which focuses on the

structure of the narrative, this can provide a complementary evaluation of the narrative in conjunction with Kohler Riessman's (1993a: 2008) method.

As discussed earlier in the chapter Labov (1972) states there are key elements and stages to the construction of a narrative, the abstract, the orientation and the complicating action, this is followed by the evaluation then finally the resolution of the story, the coda. The abstract which is a short summary of what is to come in the narrative was not always present in the family stories, whereas almost always the other elements did appear. The complicating action is referred to as the 'skeleton plot' according to Mishler (1986:237), this part of the structure of the narrative is when the key point of the narrative is introduced, it frequently starts with something like, *'and then…',* it was evident from the children's stories that they constructed their narratives very strongly around the complicating action. Both Kohler Riessman (1993a; 2008) and Labov (1972) argue that the evaluation is the most important part of the story, it reveals the storyteller's perspective and motivation. It is regarded as the crucial point in the story and in the family interviews this became apparent, this is discussed further in the analysis and discussion chapters, six, seven and eight. I, as the researcher also have an impact on the structure of the family narratives just by my choice of question or prompts. This requires reflexivity which be considered in the next section.

## Reflexivity in the research process

Reflexivity at all stages of the research process is vital when considering the ethics of interviewing families. Reflexive research acknowledges the presence of the interviewer in the research (Etherington 2004). At the interview stage personal subjectivity is evidenced by the questions that were posed and in order to elucidate the narratives, these questions and prompts were my choice. I kept a reflexive research journal throughout the research process in order to try to keep in mind my own subjectivity (see Appendix H for an excerpt). As discussed in the above section during the analysis a decision has to be made about what to focus on and how to interpret the narrative. Representation of segments of the data and portrayal of the narrators is another important facet of the research process. In qualitative interviewing especially in the setting of a family home the researcher can be very closely intertwined in the research process, a power imbalance can exist, this is

especially true while researching with children (Hill 2005). The position of the researcher inherently affects the outcome of the research.

As researchers we choose what to transcribe to what aspects of an interview to focus on and ultimately what to represent in the research process. This can lead to a 'crisis of representation' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) arguably; it can be complex and demanding to represent the voices and experiences of others justly and in a scholarly fashion. It is crucial to be aware of our social positioning; being attentive to our own status in terms of race/ethnicity/gender/sexual orientation/disability. Raising our consciousness about different power dynamics at work within the family and being sensitive about how we gather data to generate knowledge that may be a catalyst for social change (Daly 2007). Crucially, while working with children we need to be cognisant of our age; there can never be equal status between researchers and children, because of differences in development, children are always the 'researched' not the researchers (Alderson 1995; Eder and Fingerson, 2002, Dunn 2005; Hill 2005). Feminist research scholars highlighted the fallacy of separating the researcher from the researched, the importance of reflecting on feelings as well as thoughts (Allen 2000; Harding 1991). I as a researcher have to recognise my role and my part in the construction of the family narratives particularly when I was engaged in conversations with young children.

## Limitations to the Study

Relatively small qualitative studies like this one have several limitations. In terms of generalisability the intention was not to generalise the findings to a wide population like a very large scale quantitative study on families (*Growing up in Ireland* 2009 - ongoing). It was anticipated at the outset that an in-depth study and exploration of a small sample of Irish families would be the key outcome of the research. In particular a discovery of how these families spent their time together and principally what spending that time together meant to them. The demographic of the research was relatively narrow, not all family types from across all social divisions were represented despite many attempts to recruit volunteers. Getting in contact with and recruiting all types of families proved to be very challenging. This is something I would like to do more work on in the future. Another challenge that arose with this study was the access to families, in particular, their availability at the same time for

interview. Also, not all families that volunteered were suitable due to the ages of the children, especially if the children were under the age of four. Many of the interviews were conducted with one family member absent also, for instance a mother and her children but without the father present. This absence may have made for a different dynamic than if the father or other family member had been present.

I learned that it can be very challenging to conduct an interview 'out' of your own culture. I felt that I needed to be very respectful and attuned to the interviewee's culture which at times distracted me from my central task. Any sense or illusion that I was in control of the situation was lost early on in the interview process, when you enter into a person's home and family dynamic you are not in charge. Nevertheless it was so worthwhile in terms of data collection that maintaining as good a rapport as possible was crucial to interview situation. Another aspect to consider when interviewing whole families is to ensure everyone sits close together if at all possible, you get the best quality of recording but also the best layering of co-construction of narrative, that is to say the best opportunity for each family member to add to and build up the story that they are focusing on. When working with children it is vital to 'warm them up' they need a chance to get used to the interviewing process, they need to be eased into the interview process slowly and made to feel at ease (Dunn 2005; Greenstein 2006; Daly 2007).

There were also many practical concerns that I would revisit if the research was repeated. When I first explained the ethical process to the participants I found that my consent forms were too long and this can take up time. This was especially true as the younger members of the family had to have the forms 'talked' through slowly due to their age. Even though time needs to be spent on this important facet of the research process, the children's interest can be lost and it takes more time to engage them again. All the while I was conscious that I was taking up the family's time (Daly 2007). For future research I would aim to gain permission prior to the scheduling of the actual family interview.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological process followed for data collection and analysis within this research study. A particular and distinctive feature of this research is that the interviews were conducted with families as a group, similar to a focus group setting but quite distinctly different. This approach is interpretative in nature and exists within the epistemological framework of social constructionism and in the ontological position of relativism. A fundamental concept within this research is that knowledge is not given but constantly created and negotiated, meanings within family narratives are contested and emergent (Burr 2003; Gergen 2009). Given that there was little previous research available that tapped into this particular research methodology, many creative ideas had to be employed to bridge the age gap of participants in the family setting. To a degree a journey into what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls the 'sociological imagination' was required. In terms of analysis, thematic narrative analysis was chosen in order to highlight the intricacies inherent within family stories. This chapter also outlined the conceptual framework for this research, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory which is as an extremely valuable model when exploring family narratives as families are enmeshed within wider structures of community and society. The ethics of conducting research with children has been explained, especially in relation to the power dynamics between the children as participants in the interviews and myself as the researcher. Lastly, this chapter expressed the importance of personal reflexivity as a tool that the narrative analyst must acquire and utilise in order to explore the full meaning of the text and to ensure validity in the research process.

# Chapter 5 Summary of Findings

## Introduction

This chapter will present a summary of data in thematic format and serve to connect the significance of the methodology utilised with the expanse of data unearthed within this study. The chapter will highlight emergent themes evident from the family interviews. One of the central aims of the research concerned an exploration of time families spent together. The family stories generated a wealth of rich qualitative data and by carefully listening back to the family interviews, several clusters of themes began to emerge, which were in turn gradually broken down into themes and sub themes. These research processes clearly highlight that within our research undertaking as social scientists, 'analysis involves the process of breaking data down into smaller units to reveal their characteristic elements and structure' (Dey 1993:30). The analysis of the data in this research can be categorised into two distinct phases;

**Phase 1** encompassed entering data from the family interviews into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programme (CAQDAS). The software chosen to code and analyse the data into themes was NVivo 9.

**Phase 2** further analysis of the themes which had emerged from the CAQDAS was undertaken. This was achieved by using thematic narrative analysis in order to explore more deeply the narrative accounts of the families. The style of thematic narrative analysis chosen was based on the work of Kohler Riessman (2008). As outlined in the methodology chapter this method was adopted to highlight how the family members engage in co-constructive processes with a conversational circle when expressing their views on particular topics. This level of analysis weaves another layer of meaning into the rich accounts that the families explored within these qualitative interviews

This present discussion will outline and summarise the findings from the first phase of analysis using CAQDAS while the following three chapters will address phase two of the analysis referred to above. Throughout this chapter families will be

described as whole families (see Appendix A for family portraits). Pseudonyms are used for all individuals and any identifying information relating to 'the family' has been edited out.

## Emerging themes from CAQDAS NVivo 9

Twenty key themes emerged for the data within phase one of the analysis phase of the research process. These themes emerged through the analytical tool NVivo 9 outlined and critiqued in chapter 4. The chart outlined in Figure 3 points to these dominant themes. They include time together, routines and activities; themes perceived as pertinent to the study aims and objectives. The theme of *Celebrations* and *Birthdays* featured as prominent in all family conversations which served to contextualise the spending of time by all the families. *Work life balance* as a theme emerged as significant despite not featuring as a direct interview question. Similar to the work-life balance theme the following; *parenting values*, *family relationships*, *gender, changing Ireland* and *aspirations for the family* were not directly addressed in the interviews but subsequently emerged as important to family life specifically and in relation to time spent together. *Spaces* as a theme emerged as a highly significant part of the family conversations. These conversations referred specifically to the space or spaces in which the family spends time together. Within the data collection phase the discussions of space and spaces was described in detail particularly by the children. The themes of *pets, play* and *friends* were brought to the fore by the children in the families. The theme of *school* was explored by parents and children alike. *Technology* was a moderately dominant theme from the data and was discussed by all but one of the twelve families. The themes relating to the *co-construction of narrative* and *stories* concern the epistemological and methodological undertakings of this research as a whole. These said themes refer to the activity of 'the family' and the subsequent voices within the family, telling stories and anecdotes of their life together. These research themes relate to the process of honouring the voices of all family members in reflecting on the tapestry of family time, space, activities and routines.

Emergent themes from the data by number of coding references



## Themes from the data

Series1

| Theme | Value |
|-------|-------|
| Activities | 91 |
| Aspirations for family | 5 |
| Birthdays | 3 |
| Celebration | 62 |
| Changing ireland | 8 |
| Children's voices | 137 |
| Driving | 31 |
| Family relationships | 63 |
| Friends | 26 |
| Gender | 11 |
| Parenting values | 72 |
| Pets | 35 |
| Play | 51 |
| Routines | 101 |
| School | 40 |
| Spaces | 64 |
| Stories | 71 |
| Technology | 41 |
| Time together | 110 |
| Work life balance | 27 |
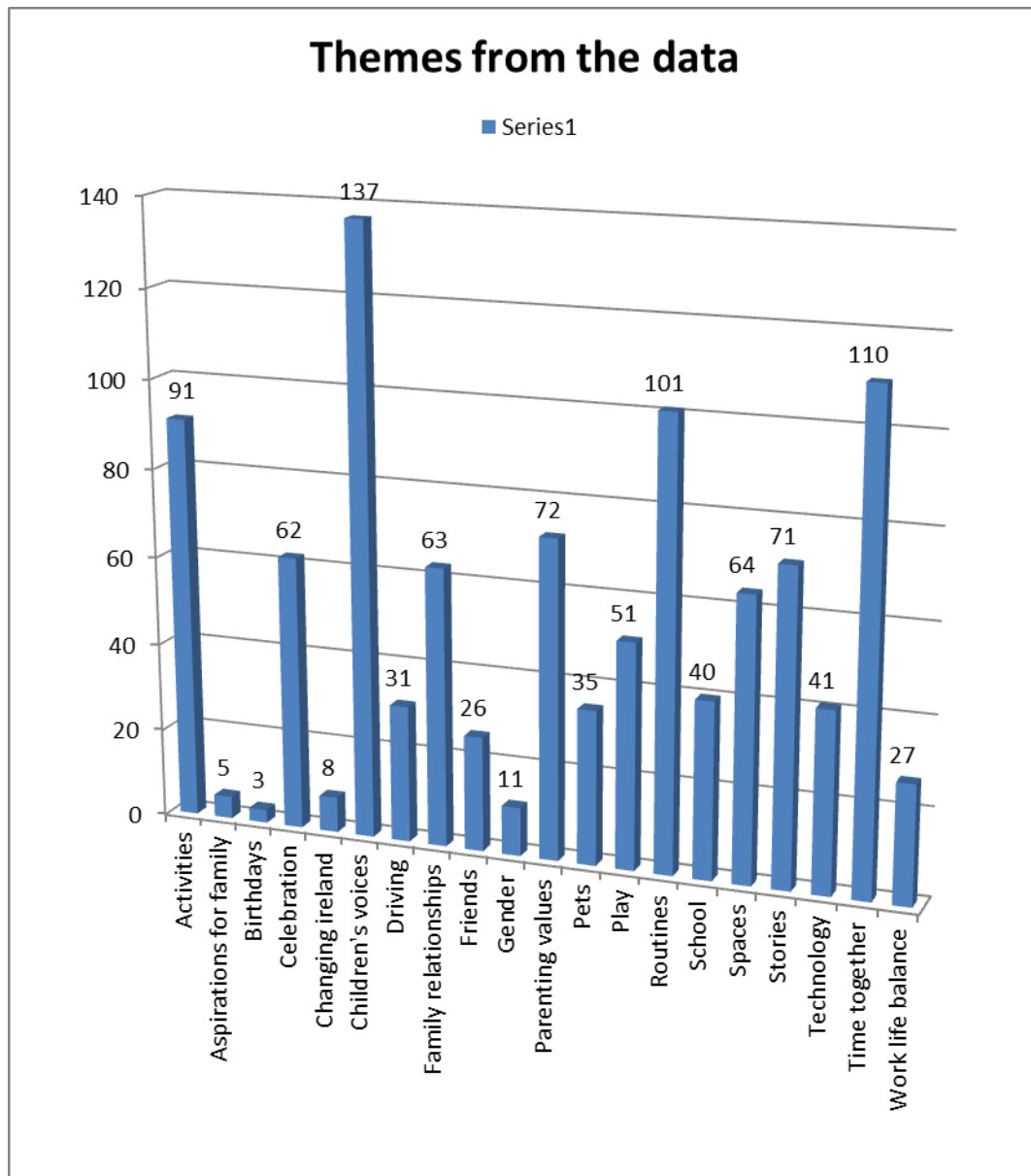
*Figure 3*

Emergent themes from the data by percentage of coding references



**Key themes**
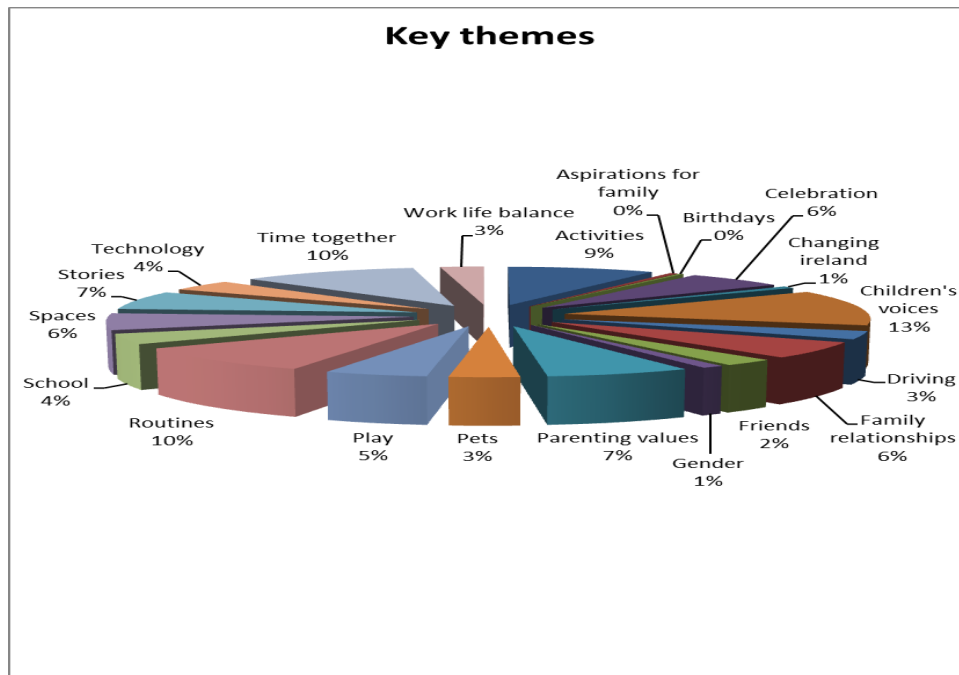
*Figure 4*

## Summary theme by theme

### Leisure activities

The theme of *leisure activities* emerged strongly from the data as can be seen in figure 5. This was a very broad theme that encompassed activities such as sport and leisure pursuits that the families engaged in together. This theme was discussed by ten of the twelve families although as can be seen by the chart this theme was cited in varying degrees by the families. The Hanlon and Barrett families mentioned activities the most, each of the children in these families were very highly engaged in different hobbies and leisure pursuits outside of the home. Most of the activities declared related to pursuits that families did together like watching a hurling match or going to the beach or activities that the children went to without parents such as music lessons or swimming. Leisure activities broke down into two further categories, firstly, activities enjoyed inside the family home and secondly activities outside the home. For example, the Barrett family children discussed activities such as baking with their grandmother as a typical indoor activity however they had a large focus on outdoor activities such as looking after the hens and going for walks and pony rides. There was another sub division in the theme of leisure activities, (1)

scheduled activities such as drama classes and (2) unscheduled activities such as going for a nature walk or to a playground. The Hanlon family, with four school age daughters had a great variety of scheduled activities such as karate, Irish dancing lessons, swimming and gymnastics. Conversely the Hanlon's also expressed that they enjoyed unplanned leisure pursuits such as watching a film on television as a family or having a picnic together in their garden. Technology such as laptops, games consoles were also described as leisure activities enjoyed by family members, this tended to be more dominant in families with older children.

Percentage response from families regarding leisure activities
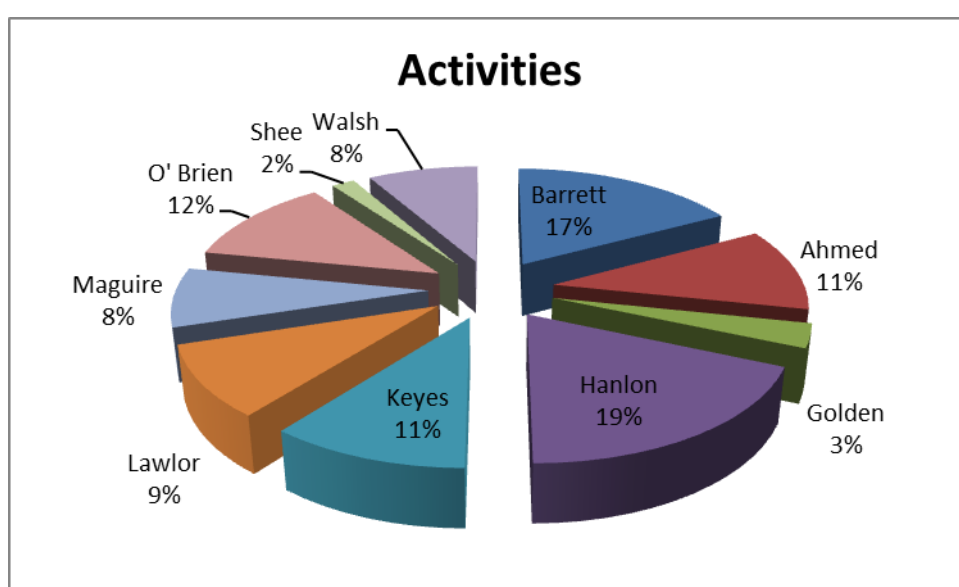


*Figure 5*

**Time Together**

This was the second most dominant theme that emerged during the analysis. Figure 6 below highlights the percentage of each interview that 'time together' was explicitly spoken about and how much by each family. All twelve of the families spoke about time spent together. The responses from the families regarding the theme of *time spent together* was dependent on a number of factors, namely, the day of the week, the time of year, for example school holidays versus term time. The families stated that there were various ways that time was spent together from mundane activities like doing the washing up together after a meal, or going on a car

journey to planned activities like going to a football match or out to a film in the cinema. In terms of ordinary everyday togetherness eating a meal together was mentioned by all the families as being important, most of the families, nine in total said that they ate together at the kitchen or dining room table all week but some families, three in total stated that the ate dinner at the table only at weekends. Often the time together was very low key but nonetheless important, children in particular mentioned very simple times of togetherness, for example one five year old expressed that her one of her favourite things was when she was allowed to snuggle up with her mother on the sofa when she was feeling unwell. Many of the families explained that they enjoyed watching a favourite television programme together. Several families explained that the highlight of the weekend was sitting down on the sofa on Saturday evening to watch 'The X factor' or the 'Late Late Toy Show'. However two of the twelve families did not watch television but occasionally watched a DVD on a laptop computer as a family. Special times like holidays or occasions like Christmas or Birthdays were frequently cited as pleasurable moments of conviviality. In fact time spent together on holidays yielded some very rich narrative accounts of time spent together. Arguably, this time together away from the normal everyday routines was memorable and provided a qualitative change for the families. Even grocery shopping together while on holidays was mentioned by six of the families as important shared moments.

In response to the question 'Do you think you have enough time together as a family?' Ten out of twelve families stated that they would like to have more time to spend to together, expressing that work, and school routines and obligations to wider family reduced the amount of time they could spend in each other's company, this was felt more strongly if both parents were working and also for the parents who were separated or single. Two out of twelve families explained that they did have enough time to spend together apart from the working day they concentrated on their home life and were content with the amount of contact they had with family members. In both these families the mother was at home full time.

Percentage of coding regarding Time Together



Time together

- Walsh 9%
- Shee 6%
- Maguire 3%
- Lawlor 2%
- Keyes 7%
- Hanlon 1%
- Golden 1%
- 3%
- 6%
- Ahmed 13%
- Arshad 15%
- Barrett 8%
- Giles 26%
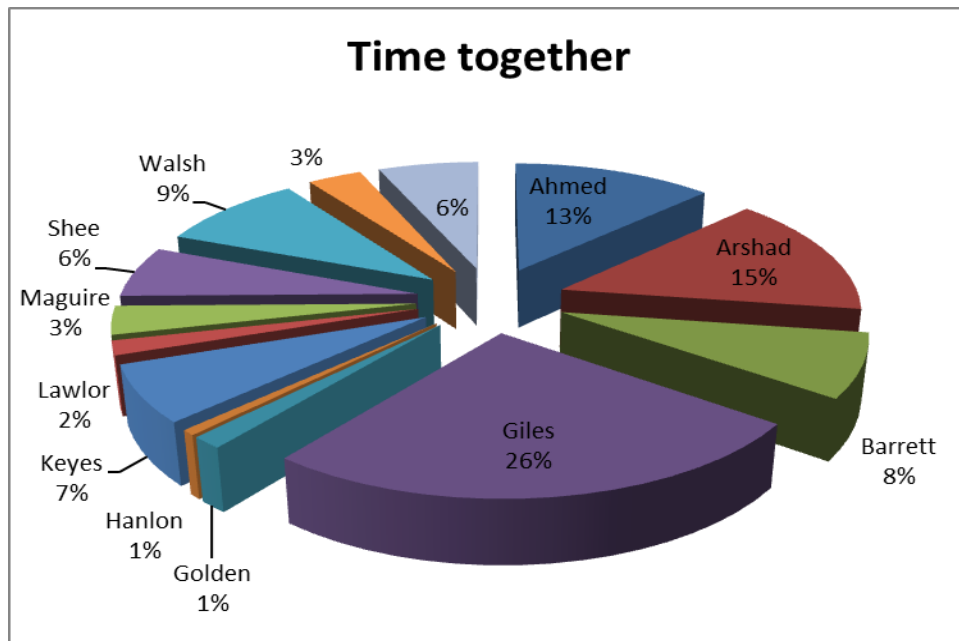
*Figure 6*

## Family Routine

Family routine was another theme that emerged strongly from the data as can been in figure 7. The theme of routines had several dimensions including mealtimes, bedtimes, school runs after school activities and how all of these were managed throughout the day and week. This theme of routines linked closely with other themes that emerged from the data such as the themes of '*activities*' and '*driving*'. Eleven of the twelve families talked about family routines. Although as can be seen from the chart that some families spoke a great deal in their interview about routines while a few families spoke relatively little about routines, for example the Arshad family spoke about this theme for 25 per cent of their total interview. While discussing routines many of the family members stressed that routines can be confining and demanding on personal and family time this overlaps with the theme of *work life balance* which is discussed further in this chapter. Routines can also engender a sense of security and predictability which was cited as important by the parents of younger children, for instance storytelling as part of a bedtime routine for

a young child. It is interesting to note that the routines of families with older children and adolescents were distinctly different from the routines of families with young children. With the older families there was more variability in the routines of the school week as compared to the weekend with adolescents 'sleeping in' in the mornings and staying up late at night. The theme of routines also highlighted the topic of domestic labour and how much each family member helps with household tasks related to routines. The next figure illustrates the percentage of time each family focussed on speaking about routines.

Percentage response from families regarding routines
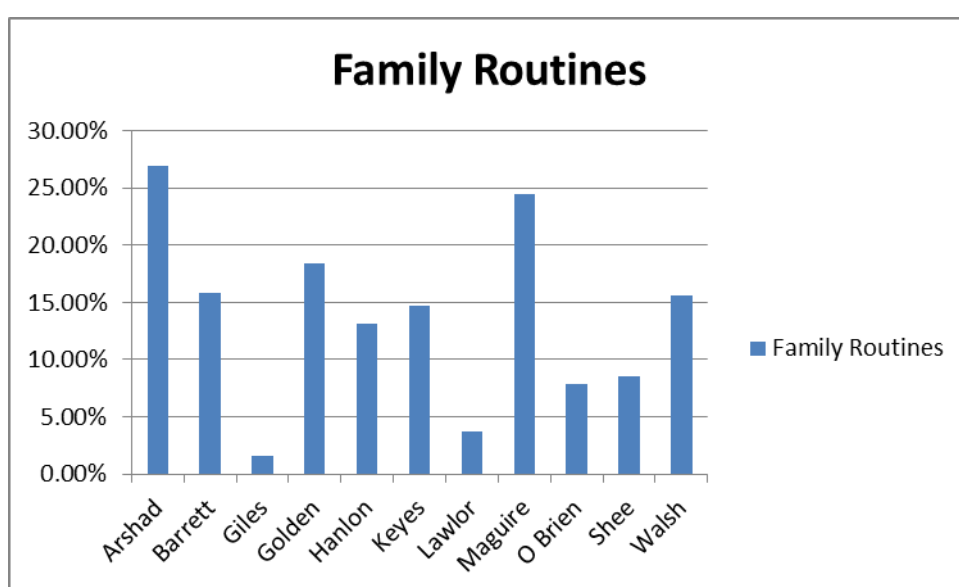


*Figure 7*

## Ritual and Celebration

Another prominent theme that emerged from the data was that of family rituals and celebrations see figure 8 below. Ritual is closely connected to family routines and arguably routines can evolve into rituals through repetition over time (Fiese 2006). Family rituals can be very significant for each individual family and can be passed down from previous generations. All of the families interviewed discussed the importance of ritual occasions in relation to time spent together, events like family birthdays or religious occasions such as Communions or Christmas or Eid. Discussion of this theme proved to be very fruitful with all family members joining

in the conversation sharing memories of particular occasions. Children in particular expressed their views on ritual practices of Halloween or their own birthdays. Special clothes, treats and traditions were associated with these ritual times, for example the Arshad children spoke of having special clothes to wear to celebrate the festival of Eid. Occasions such as Communions, Christenings and Confirmations stimulated discussion on the preparation of food and the decoration and organisation of the home in readiness for visitors. *Birthdays* as a distinct theme emerged relatively strongly from the data but fitted better as a sub theme of the broader theme of *celebration*. Many of the children interviewed spoke about birthday parties with friends or smaller celebrations with family especially if there was stand out memory one respondent aged eight recalled her tooth falling out at her birthday party while blowing out her candles. Christmas was spoken about by every family interviewed in response to spending time together and each had a special memory of the occasion. For some separated families this was a time of year that involved negotiation between parents about where and when the children would spend time with each parent on Christmas day. All twelve of the families interviewed spoke about these special times together, although, as can be visualised from the next chart there was a great deal of variability in how much each family spoke about celebration. On average under ten per cent of the entire interview was engaged with speaking about family celebrations although this tended be very rich descriptive accounts although not constituting a great deal of time spent on this topic.

Percentage response from families regarding ritual and celebration
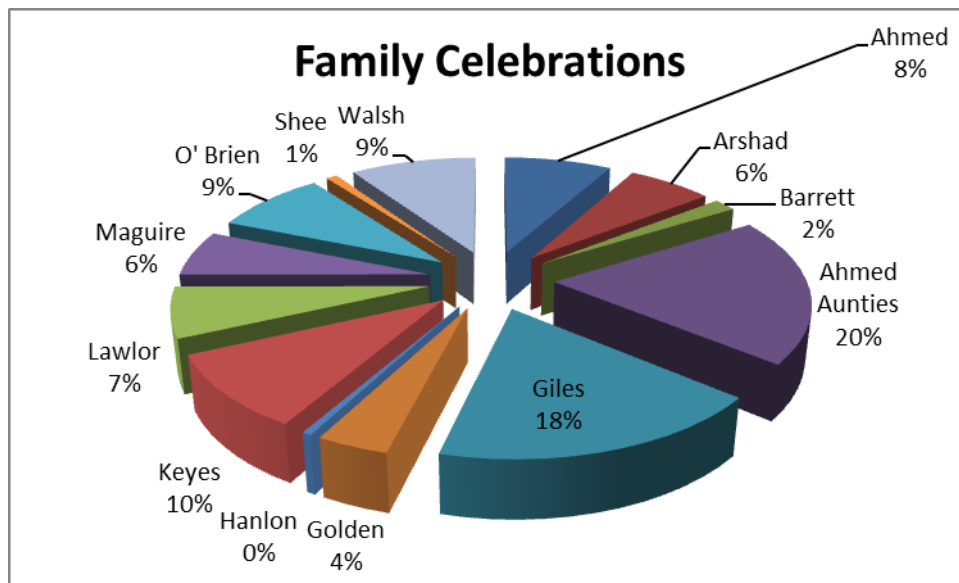


*Figure 8*

## Work life balance/ time pressure at home

*Work life balance* as a theme linked closely with the theme of *routines.* Seven of the twelve families expressed that occasionally their time spent together was negatively impacted by the demands of work and school and even extra- curricular activities for the children, see figure 9 below. These seven families spoke about how they felt under pressure in regards to family time with busy schedules. Although, five of the twelve families did not mention this topic at all in their interviews. Two of the families the Arshad and Ahmed families spoke about this topic the most with the remaining families devoting relatively little time to this theme in comparison to other themes. Concepts such as planning and organisation and delegation of tasks were discussed when the families spoke about work life balance. For example, one mother who worked full time outside the home explained that lots of planning and preparation is required day to day in order to successfully juggle the demands of work and family, arranging meals for the week on weekends, catching up with the laundry and even family obligations. This mother expressed that she would love more flexibility in her work life to in order to spend more time with her children.

This issue of work demands clashing with parenting emerged in several more of the interviews, for instance another a single parent with one son aged nine years explained that she felt that work can take over your life and expressed regret about not working part time when her son was younger. Similarly, another interviewee, a separated mother of one daughter explained that her working week could be so long and so hectic that she sometimes did not get time for lunch. She explained her wish for time to be less scheduled at the weekend to allow her and her daughter to get away from the constraints of schedules momentarily.

A recurrent sub theme in *work life balance* was the development over time of too many competing schedules impacting on time spent together as a family. An illustration of this phenomenon is a family with four daughters, where the mother in the family stated that they had recently made the decision to cut back on the level of activities that the girls were involved in after school as it had become very demanding on their resources and time. Commuting was stated as a work life balance issue by three of the families who worked a considerable distance from home, each of these families suggested that this negatively impacted on time spent together as a family, as several hours a week were spent in the car.

Percentage time devoted to time pressure in family interview



*Figure 9*

118
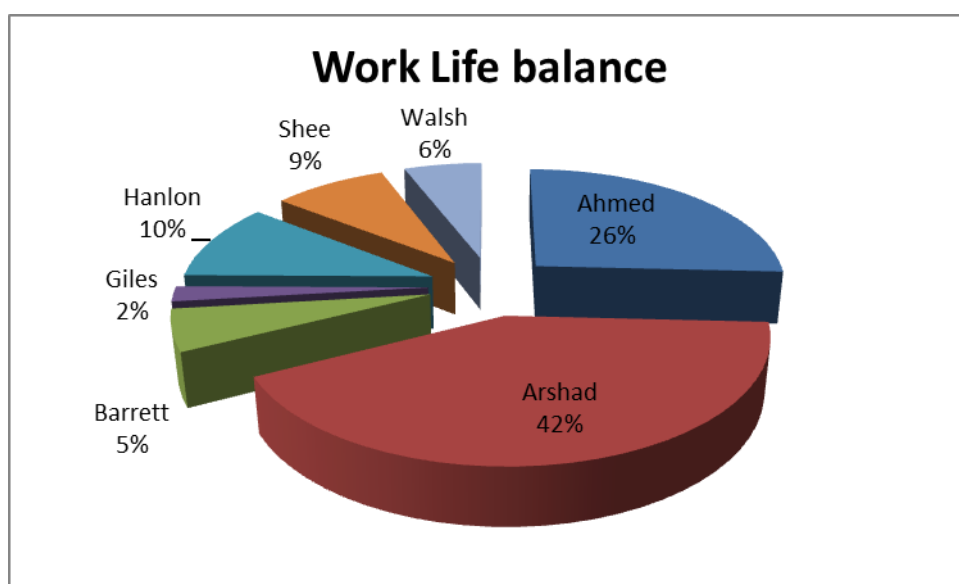
**Spaces and places where families spend their time together.**

The figure below outlines the percentage of each interview by family spent talking about the spaces they live in. Eleven of the twelve families spoke about the places and spaces where they spent their time, see figure 10 below. Both adults and children contributed to the discussion on particular spaces where activities where enjoyed with other family members. It included spaces within the home such as around the kitchen table to favourite places on the sofa. Outside space was also mentioned frequently by children areas such as 'cubbies' or 'dens'. The Barrett and O'Brien families devoted the most time speaking about spaces used by the family in the home and garden. Both these families had children in the age group of five years to twelve years and both had detached homes in the countryside with large gardens. The other families who spoke about this topic only spoke about it ten percent or less of their interview time. Several of the mothers interviewed stated that they spent most of their waking time at home in the kitchen preparing food and dealing with laundry as well as helping children with homework.

Percentage response regarding spaces in family interview
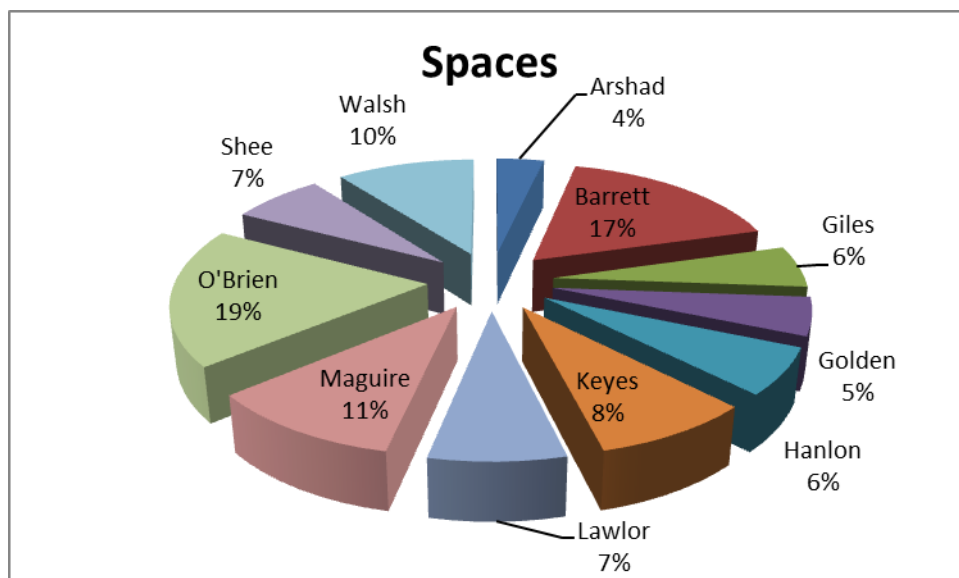


*Figure 10*

**Technology**

As might be expected, technology was a key theme spoken about by eleven of the twelve families interviewed by children and adults alike. Television was the most commonly mentioned when discussing family time together. Games consoles, such as 'Nintendo' and laptops also featured as did mobile phones. Although mobile phones were mentioned the least and usually this related to parental disapproval of young children owning mobile phones. Figure 11 below indicates that certain families like the Ahmed's and the Maguire's spoke a good deal about use of technology in the home this may be attributed to the fact that they have teenage children who owned their own technological devices. Whereas, the lowest mention of technology was with the Arshad family who have two children less than six years and the Shee family similarly have one child under five years old. The Golden family with two children also under six years are missing from this grouping as they referred very little to technology in their interview.

Percentage of interviewee response regarding Technology
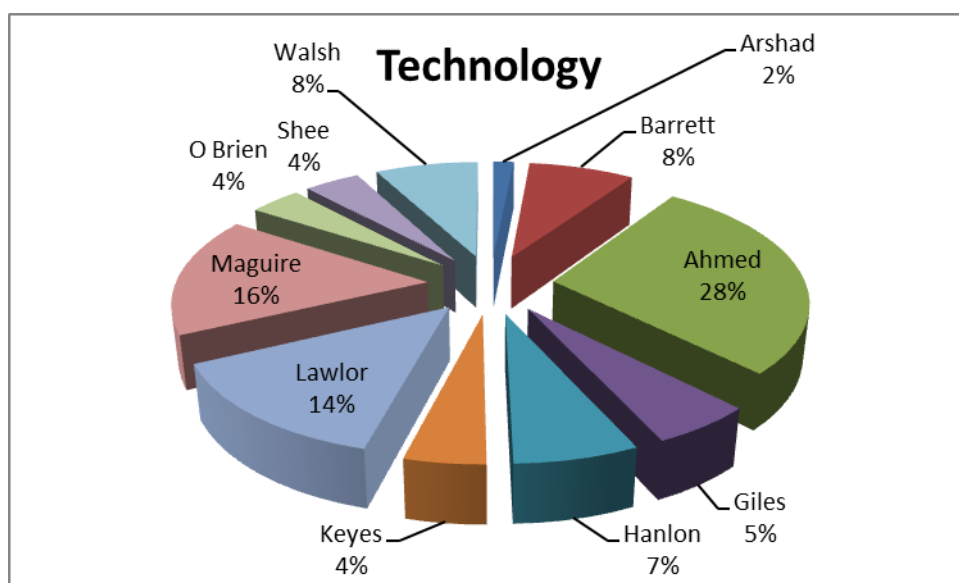


*Figure 11*

**Gender and housework at home**

The theme of gender and gendered roles at home emerged from the interviews, but not very strongly from all the family interviews, see figure 12 below. Only seven of twelve families spoke about gendered roles. This theme mostly related to the division of household labour along gendered lines. Interestingly, none of the families headed by a lone parent spoke about gender and division of labour; this is possibly due to the fact that they do not have another parent living in the family home who has a particular role in everyday household jobs and routines. One family in particular the Ahmed family spoke the most about household labour at home as divided down gendered lines, at 66 per cent of total discussion about gender. This was the highest amount the mother in the family spoke a great deal about how her days are very busy working as a mother to her two sons aged ten and seventeen and that she felt her role is primarily as a wife and mother. Her husband spoke at length about how his Muslim faith meant that his wife should not work outside the home. Other families like the Hanlon's spoke relatively little about gender and housework however they did speak about how their household was very equitable with the parents each doing their fair share in relation to childcare and routine activities associated with the family.

Percentage response from families regarding gender
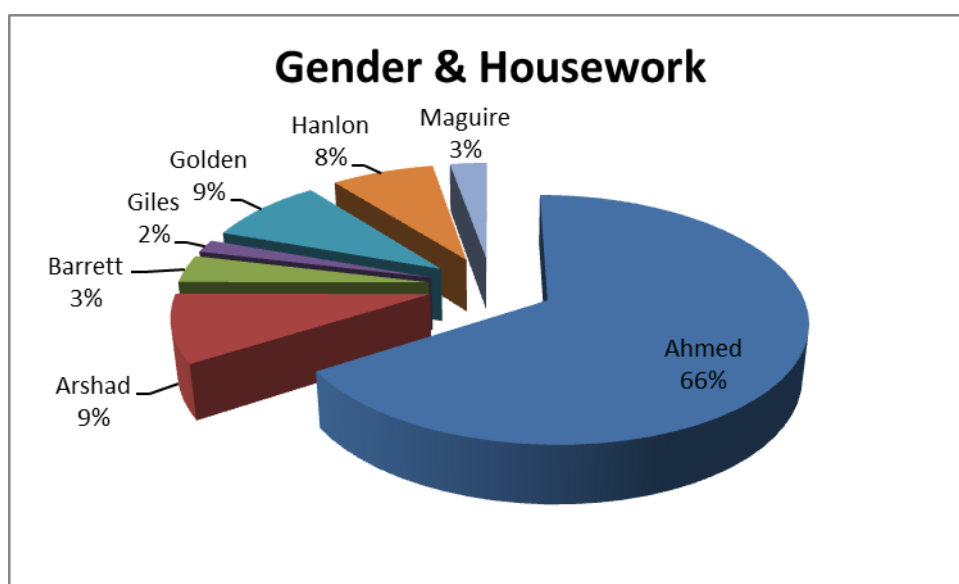


*Figure 12*

**Driving**

When discussing time spent together in modern families the topic of time spent together in the car emerged. Driving was a topic that was discussed by the majority of families interviewed, eleven out of twelve families spoke about this subject see figure 13 below. All of the families interviewed owned at least one car and seven out of twelve of the families owned two cars. Two families in particular spoke about time spent travelling in the car the most. Both these families have older children ages ten to seventeen so possibly with multiple school runs so much of their time is spent in the car. The families with younger children spent less time discussing time spent driving. The responses that the families gave regarding the topic of driving depended on the length of journey and consequent time spent in the car. Living in a rural location meant more time spent in the car in general for the families.

Families with school age children reported that they used their car for multiple trips each day and most of these journeys were connected with school and after school activities for children as well as for shopping and work. Families where the mother worked outside of home like the Arshad and Shee family reported that they spent a lot of time in the car, expressing that they felt hurried a lot of the time. One family expressed that they felt frustrated about time spent in the car stating that their children frequently get fractious while in the car and that it was difficult to maintain eye contact and reassure children who were strapped into their car seats and thus they avoided long journeys.

How this time travelling was spent was also discussed by the families, several explained that the children enjoyed playing with technology in the car as well as playing with traditional  toys like dolls or toy cars. Listening to the radio was mentioned, singing in the car and playing games like 'eye spy'. One family expressed that their car is like an extension of their home because they spend so much time in the car. The children in this family go to several different schools and live quite a way from school and work and also often visit relations quite a distance away. Frequently they did their homework in the car or ate a snack before going on to an after school activity.

Many of the families felt there was positive aspects to spending time together in the car and described that the car was a good space for a chat with children and adults

alike, allowing for the opportunity to catch up with news from school on the journey home. In one family the parents said the car was the space where they did most of their talking as it was quite private and was a space that lacked the normal interruptions associated with a busy home life.

Percentage of interviewee response regarding family time spent in the car
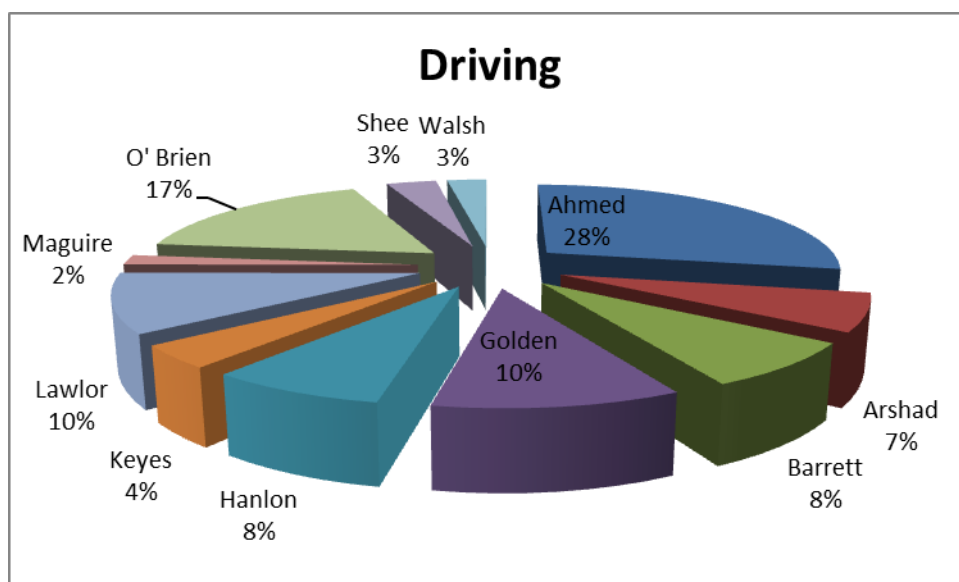


*Figure 13*

**Parenting Values**

Parenting practices were not explicitly asked about in the interview questions. However, a clear pattern of response emerged from the data in relation to the beliefs that guide parenting. This became the theme of *parenting values,* see figure 14. This was a response entirely from adults with no input from the children. Nine of the twelve families spoke about this topic and three families did not mention it at all. Some of the participants like the parents from the Golden family spoke extensively about their parenting values and philosophies in relation to how they spent their time together as a family. This theme also incorporated the sub themes of *changing Ireland* and *aspirations for the future,* each of these sub themes were only mentioned by three of the twelve families.

Percentage response from families regarding parenting values

**Parenting values**



- Maguire 1%
- O' Brien 1%
- Walsh 11%
- Lawlor 2%
- Hanlon 4%
- Golden 22%
- Giles 7%
- Ahmed 12%
- Arshad 4%
- Barrett 11%
- Ahmed Auntie 25%
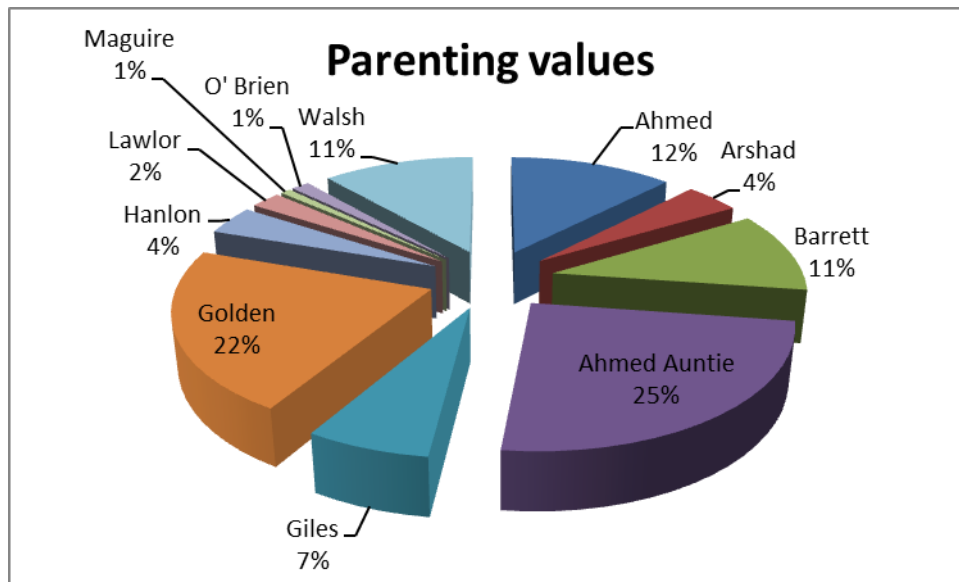
*Figure 14*

## Family Relationships

The theme of *family relationships* comprised of responses from children and adults relating to spending time with relations within the immediate family and also the wider kinship network, see figure 15. The theme though important in terms of content emerged as a relatively small proportion of the conversations in the family interviews only spoken about on average for six per cent of the interview time. Several of the families referred to visits with grandparents' aunts, uncles and cousins. Five of the families had relations living with them or immediately beside their households, four families had grandparents living with them and one family had an aunt sharing their home. Two of the families, the Ahmeds and the Arshads both Muslim families explained that extended family was highly important for them and that they liked to spend as much time as possible with their wider family. Some of the families described that meeting up with relations was mostly on special occasions such as religious events like communion, confirmation and Christmas and Easter. This aspect overlaps with the theme of *celebration* to a large extent. Several of the parents and children said that they frequently keep in touch with family relations by social media to share news and photographs, this was especially important if the

relatives were overseas. This facet intersects with the theme of *technology*. Three of the families who were headed by a one parent expressed that wider family was crucial to their everyday routines such as getting to school or to help with informal babysitting. In addition the adults and children in these same households described how vital it was to keep in contact with the family of the other parent.

 Percentage response from families regarding family relationships

## Family Relationships

Ahmed 11%
Arshad 6%
Barrett 4%
Giles 3%
Hanlon 5%
Keyes 13%
Lawlor 8%
Maguire 20%
O Brien 3%
Shee 1%
Walsh 26%
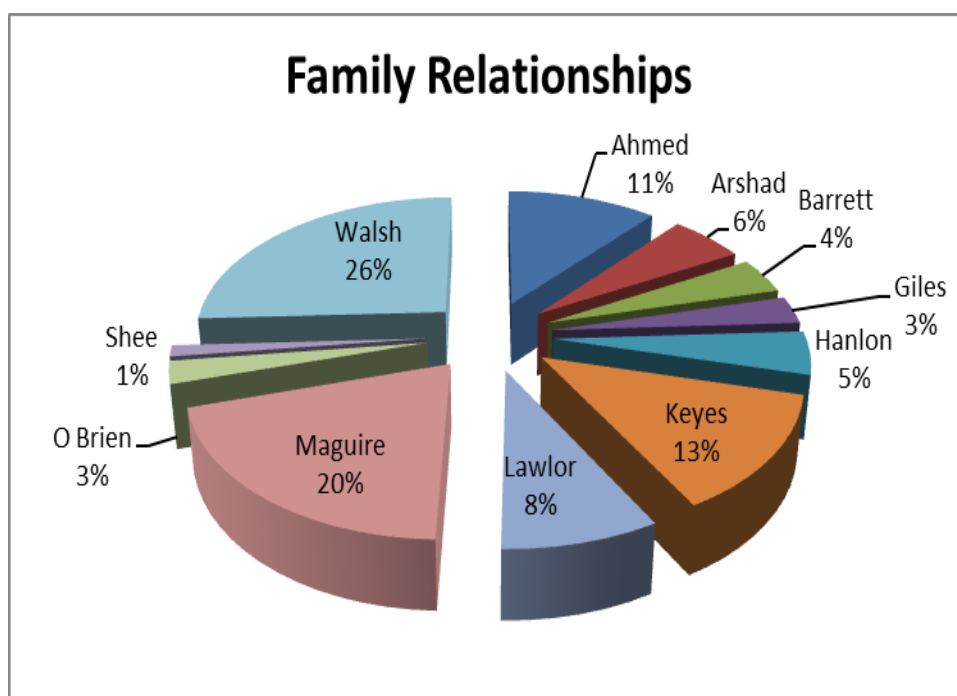
*Figure 15*

## Children's voices

Some of the emergent themes from the data were heavily influenced by the voices of the children. There was one overarching theme from the data in relation to the children interviewed *children's voices* and additionally some themes such as *school*, *friends, play* and *pets* were dominated by the voices of the children from the families. Twenty six children contributed to the family interviews, twenty girls and six boys and their ages ranged from three years to age seventeen years with the majority of the children aged from five to thirteen years. In this research it is assumed that children are competent social actors able to give their own accounts of

life in a family, also that their accounts are given equal weight in the analysis of the interviews.

**Pets**

The subject of family pets was articulated by ten of the twelve families, although with a greater contribution from the children but not exclusively see figure 16. Three families spoke about family pets the most, each of these families having multiple pets which they considered very much part of their families. Some very interesting stories emerged out of the families' discussion of their pets. It was noteworthy from the families' accounts that pets were clearly considered as being very valuable and were spoken about with affection and sometimes mirth. Most of the families who had pets owned dogs and cats, but some families owned guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits, fish, ponies and donkeys. There were some general rules and obligations discussed about the pets in the family, issues such as, who was responsible for the pet, where the pet slept and was fed and  the parts of the house where the pet had access to.  Pets were described with regard and some were obviously pampered, one family had a little toy dog George who has several dog outfits for when he goes for walks. George is not allowed upstairs but constantly tries to sneak into the families' beds upstairs.

Discussion of family pets led to some illuminating narratives on time spent together, for example, one family have a great variety of pets, the father in the family loves pets and this was a very important aspect of shared time together for this particular family. The father builds elaborate guinea pig runs with his son so that their pets have a safe and stimulating environment, both father and son expressed that they enjoyed this aspect of pet care greatly, working for a common goal together.  Some families expressed that allowances need to made for visitors to the family home who come with pets in tow, for example the Maguire family said they welcome their family members with pets too, Harriet Maguire's elderly mother will not travel without her dog, so she is not always welcome everywhere she goes, Harriet feels strongly that she wants her mother to feel comfortable and able to bring her pet with her at family gatherings, so that they can maximise the time they spend together.. As can be seen from figure 15  the Maguire family spoke more than any other family about pets, they explained that their labrador dog Ruby  is a very positive addition to

their family and that they have always felt that pets are good for children giving them responsibility. This sentiment was echoed by the Barrett family parents who stressed that children can observe the natural cycles of birth and death while caring for pets and that this is an important learning experience.

Percentage response from families regarding p**ets**
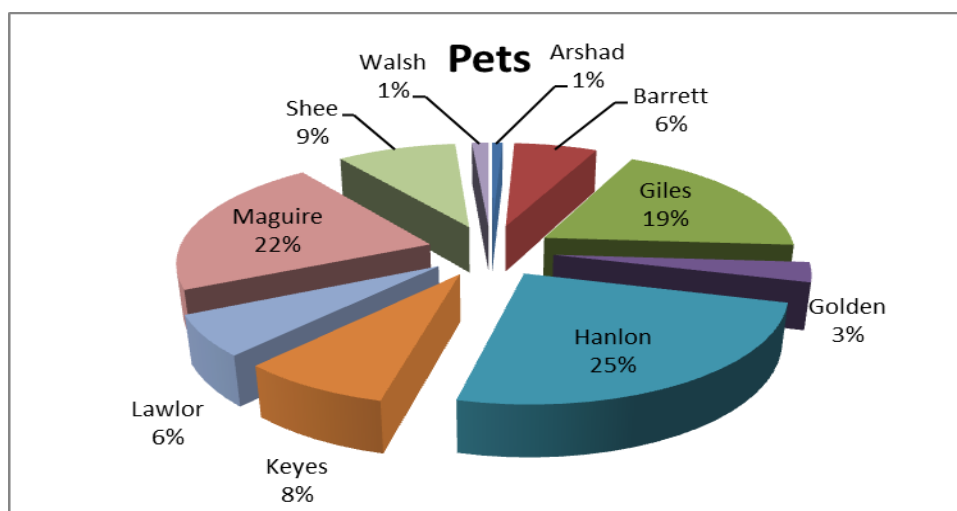


*Figure 16*

**Friends**

Friends were spoken about by many of the children in the interviews in various situations. However, it was not a very dominant theme even when asking children about how they like to spend their time. The ages of the children in the families was reflected in the responses that they gave regarding spending time with friends. Some of the younger children explained how they liked to use their time with friends, such as the Barrett children who enjoyed cleaning their ponies with their friends and also baking with friends if the weather was too inclement to go outside. The Barrett family makes a special effort to involve friends in everyday activities as the children are home schooled and as such may not have daily contact with other children. The Lawlor children, twins, who are aged five years, have just started school so have a new circle of friends and they are just starting to be asked to birthday parties of classmates something they say they are happy about. For many of the children particularly those living in urban areas friends were also neighbours and they explained that a lot of time was spent outdoors on common areas in estates playing with these comrades. For the adolescents in the interviews peers were very important, for example a companion to enjoy as shared activity such as sport or to

enjoy leisure time with such as going to a concert. The response from parents of adolescents and preteen children regarding friendships was one of caution and concern that their child was with the 'right crowd.'

**Play**

Nine of the families spoke about play during their interviews, the children contributing most. *Play* as a theme overlapped to a certain extent with the theme of *activities* and *technology,* see figure 17. Play and games were referred to by children throughout the interviews and frequently when they described some aspect of a game or activity they would ask if they could show the toys that they played with. This happened with each family of the nine families where play was mentioned and this seemed to be an important aspect of each child's contribution. For example if a child mentioned that they like to play with Lego with their siblings they would want to get the Lego model and explain all about it. There was a relatively even split between indoor and outdoor play. In one family the children, two girls, spoke about how they loved to play inside with fairies and 'Sylvanian families', their mother explained that the girls would be absorbed for hours in their own elaborate game. These girls liked to play with their neighbours outside in their estate with the neighbouring children too. Siblings frequently played together although there was sometimes disagreement. Traditional games like hide and seek and climbing in trees were mentioned by almost all the families. Jigsaws and puzzles and making scrapbooks were a favourite play activity of one five year old again quite traditional play activities. Reading and card games were a favourite of many of the families also. All of the families explained that they used technology for play activities, games consoles and laptops however, it was not as extensively spoken about compared to other types of play such as make believe play and playing in dens and cubbies outside.

Percentage response relating to the theme of play
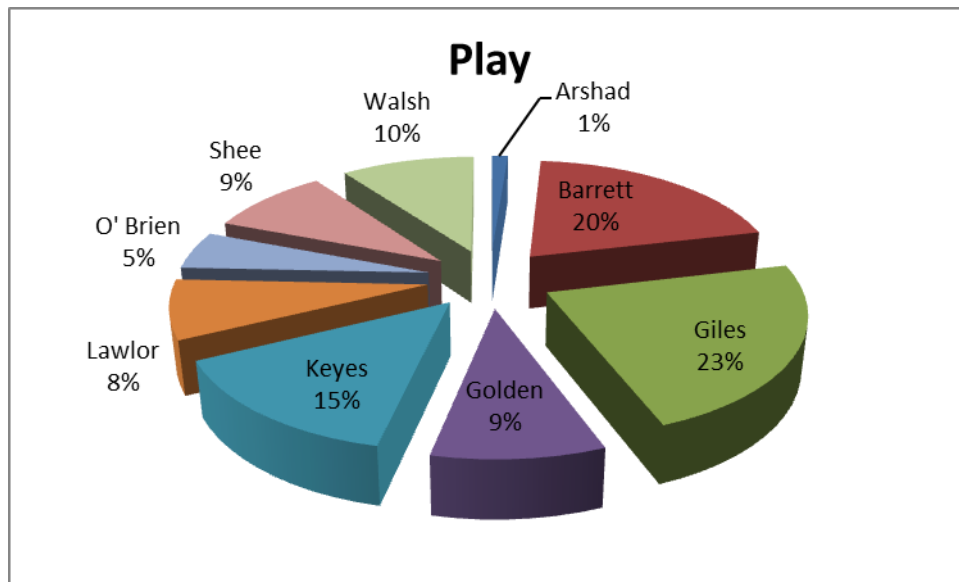


*Figure 17*

**School**

*School* as theme was discussed to a moderate extent by nine out of the twelve families both by children and adults, see figure 18 below. Depending on the ages of the children the families spoke about different aspects of school life. The conversation was dominated by topics such as homework and after school study by families like the O'Briens and the Maguires who all have children in secondary school. Whereas, families with younger children like the Lawlors and the Shees spoke about how their children are just getting used to going to school and they have observed much developmental change in the last school year. Many of the younger primary school children expressed that they enjoyed the breaks in school when they could play with their friends and older 'buddies' children who were assigned by the school to mentor them. As can be seen from the chart below, some families like the Barretts referred to the topic of school the more than some of the other families.

This family home schooled their two daughters and the parents spoke about their philosophy in relation to how their children were educated. They expressed that they felt their children might be exposed to religious indoctrination if they attended conventional schools. Another family, the Golden family spoke at length about how

they felt that religion had a great deal of influence in the administration and ethos of schools in Ireland, the mother in this family is a Swedish national and expressed her belief that she would like her daughters to attend a secular school. Another value that three of the families expressed was the need for the school as a social outlet; they explained that school time is not just for formal education but necessary for social and personal development of children too. One family, the Walsh family explained that parents need to keep a clear line of communication with the school their child is attending in order to discover if their child is experiencing difficulty with school work or having behavioural or emotional problems as these can be overlooked with busy schedules  Finally many of the families spoke about how they felt school routines could be rather inflexible especially with homework and after school study, this characteristic overlaps with the theme of *routines.*

Percentage response from families regarding school
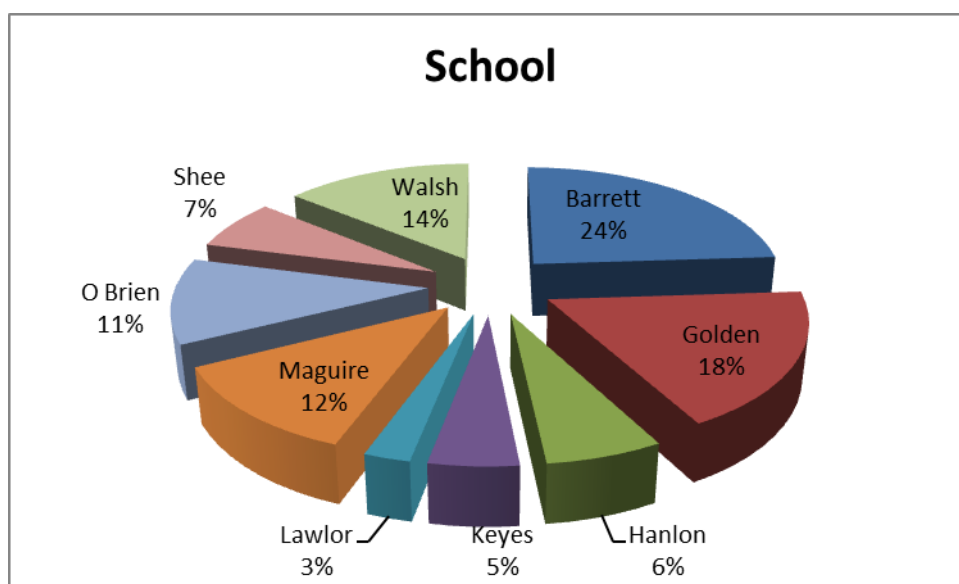


*Figure 18*

**Family Stories**

Eleven of the families had distinct family stories that were told jointly. This key theme of joint storytelling emerged very strongly and somewhat unexpectedly from the interviews ,see figure 19. Family stories as a topic were not directly asked about but spontaneously arose from the responses that the families gave to other questions. The content of the stories varied greatly children and adults participated in the retelling of family stories. Many of the stories involved humour or a dramatic or

memorable turn to the tale. This theme also proved to be fertile in terms of rich data and collaboration between the speakers. Some of the stories overlapped with the theme of *celebration* for example the Arshad family explained a story of going to a religious festival 'The Hajj', the two young children in the family added to the account with a tale about a goat being sacrificed for the event.

The Walsh family, Mum and nine year old son Jeff tell the story of a wrestling game between two cousins in the family that goes badly and hilariously awry. Many of the stories involved birthday and special occasion celebrations. The Barrett family vividly describe a story of last minute Christmas salvation for their turkey that was raised for the festive season. The Giles family had a family tradition since the parents were on honeymoon of bringing back a Christmas tree decoration from every city that they ever visited, all four family members explained details of this story, explaining with glee the moment that the tree collapsed with the quantity of decorations weighing it down. Holidays were another source of family stories; often the children particularly relished the tales of their parent's holiday misadventures and embarrassment. The Maguire's tell of a hilarious incident of mistaken while identity on holiday, Dad mistaking another cabin for their own with a dramatic turn at the end of the tale.

Pets also seem to provide good material and many comic moments in family stories. For example, the story of the Giles' family cat 'Tabitha' who is fed by all the neighbours and consequently is now on a strict diet. The tale of 'Rusty' the Hanlon's three legged dog which contains many twists and turns detailing how 'Rusty' came to have three legs not four and his adventures since. Weather conditions such as sun snow and storms also added to the topics that families told stories about, fallen trees, snowmen kept in the freezer and other special tales seems to be unique to each family telling them.

Percentage response from families regarding family stories



Family stories

- Arshad 2%
- Barrett 6%
- Giles 9%
- Golden 4%
- Hanlon 14%
- Keyes 17%
- Lawlor 14%
- Maguire 12%
- O'Brien 20%
- Shee 1%
- Walsh 1%
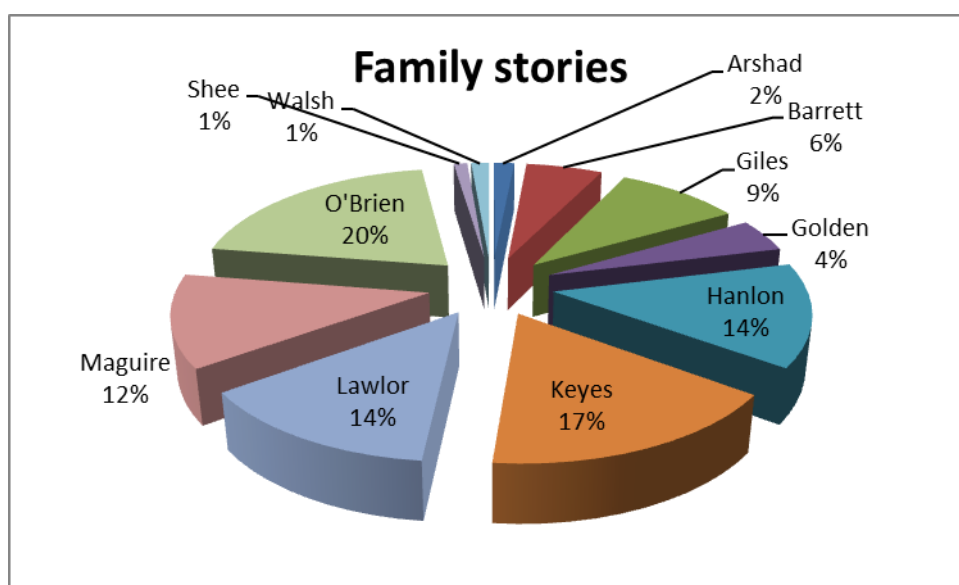
*Figure 19*

## Conclusion

In conclusion by using CAQDAS NVivo 9 twenty key themes emerged from the large volume of data generated by the family interviews. Many of these themes overlapped with each other to a large extent, such as time spent together and routines or play, friends and activities. NVivo works to gives a give a good broad brush stroke approach to coding and is rigorous in terms of being able to see at a glance the incidences of a theme. From the themes we can see that many themes were common to all families such as celebrations and yet some themes such as parenting values were not as dominant in all families. However in order to explore the in depth meaning that is inherent within dynamic family interactions we have to go deeper, using the method of thematic narrative analysis to analyse the family interviews. This requires detailed line by line analysis of the conversational turns taken by family members in the interviews. This is achieved by going over the conversational turns taken by each of the family members and One of the most interesting themes emerging from the data was that of family storytelling. It was felt that this could not be fully appreciated by use of CAQDAS alone but instead required a more nuanced and in depth approach offered by thematic narrative analysis which will be explored in detail the next chapter.

# Chapter 6 Analysis and discussion of Family Routines

## Introduction

> Family routines are defined as; observable, repetitive behaviours which involve two or more family members and which occur with predictable regularity in the day -to- day, week -to -week life of the family.
>
> (Jenson et al. 1983:2001)

This analysis and discussion chapter will outline and discuss some of the main themes uncovered in the family interviews. A key research aim of the study was to explore with the family members how they spend time together so by breaking down the data into smaller units it was hoped to uncover the common threads and themes inherent within the family member's responses. The first step in this process was to carefully listen back to the family interviews several times to get a sense of the subjects and issues that were at the heart of family life. The themes that emerged were subsequently broken down into themes and sub themes. The themes were then coded with the aid of qualitative data analysis software as was outlined in the previous chapter. This first stage of analysis was broad coding of the themes emerging from the interviews.

However, in order to elucidate the deeper meanings that were inherent in the family interviews it was felt that further analysis would be necessary. This final layer of analysis was achieved by using thematic narrative analysis as proposed by Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008). Thematic narrative analysis was chosen as the best method in order to reveal how the family members would co-construct a conversational circle when expressing their views on a particular topic. Participants' comments from the qualitative interviews are quoted and indented at appropriate points in the chapter and relevant theory will be woven throughout to support the discussion. Throughout this chapter families will be described as whole families (see Appendix

A for family portraits) and each family member who contributes to the interview segment will be written in parentheses. Pseudonyms are used for all individuals and any identifying information relating to the family has been edited out. As a key methodological consideration for this research was to keep the family interviews intact as much as feasible, so each of the families when first introduced in this chapter will be described in under the sub- heading, *family portrait*. This will provide relevant background information about the composition of each family. Another equally important methodological assumption for this research is the primacy of children's voices in the interviews (Corsaro 2005; Engel 2005; Greene and Hogan 2005; Hill 2005; James and James 2004; Westcott and Littleton 2005). Children are included throughout the chapter in the quotes with their families and also occasionally speaking by themselves but in the presence of their family. A final consideration is that the voices of children may be supported by the presence of other family members and by the familiar surroundings of home (Hennessy and Heary 2005).

## Family routines

Family routine emerged as a pivotal theme from the family interviews, for the purpose of close narrative analysis this theme was further sub divided into, mealtimes, morning routines, bedtimes, school routines, after school activities, weekend routines and housework routines. The analysis explores the meanings that routines have for the family members and examines how all of the routines are maintained throughout the day and week. The excerpts from the interviews below encompass both child and parent perspectives although on average parents tended to have more to say about routines than children compared to other topics. The theme of routines linked closely with other themes that emerged from the data such as those of 'activities' 'time pressure' and 'family rituals and celebrations' travelling together in the car and issues of the sharing of domestic labour.

Time spent in most households is largely connected to domestic routines according to (Daly 2001, 2006; Fiese 2006; Fiese et al. 2001). Eleven out of the twelve families interviewed discussed family routines in their interviews, an additional seven families explained that at times these routines felt overly demanding on their time and it could be difficult to synchronise activities and obligations for each family

member. According to Fiese (2006), routines can be supportive but also restrictive; this was borne out by the experiences of many of the families especially in relation to school routines. Family routines are frequently and substantially dictated by the needs and activities of the children which can be rewarding but also emotionally and physically challenging (Daly 2007). In a similar vein Hochschild (1997) suggests that women may seek refuge at work as a break from home routines that are structured by family obligations. Several of the families, seven in total explained that they appreciated the support of family members in the wider family to sustain their family routines, especially from grandmothers, mothers in law, sisters, and particularly from friends. It could be considered from these accounts that family routines are embedded and maintained by wider networks of support (Bronfenbrenner 2005). Above all, the interviews with families provided data that supported the concept that routines are personal and unique to each family. Each family creates and develops their own particular routines creating a secure base which has its own norms and rules about what is acceptable behaviour (Blum-Kulka 1997; Fiese 2006). All the individuals in a family with perhaps the exception of very young children tend to be aware of their particular routines and rhythms of their family life, and to accept them as natural and logical, as Fiese (2006: 4) describes it thus, 'family routines and rituals make sense to families'

## Mealtime routine

Frequently when routines were discussed, the family members would mention mealtimes, either breakfast lunch or dinner. The routines around mealtimes tended to depend on the age of the children in the household with older children usually having more commitments that might keep them out of sync with other family members. Socialisation of children into the norms and rules of appropriate behaviour is frequently carried out at the dinner table (Blum-Kulka 1997; Fiese 2006). This was echoed by the responses of several of the families in the research, five families spoke about how the children learnt to ask nicely for things and to respect each other's turn to speak over the dinner table,  J. P. Giles, dad of two daughters ages six and eight, expresses it thus, *'the girls know that we expect them to be polite and kind to each other when we are all together at the table'* The family table is often a site of discussion between family members (Fiese 2006). One mother said about her family

around the table, *'if somebody has something to say, it's probably a good chance to say it'* (Harriet a mother of four children). Conflicts occur and can be resolved over mealtimes; and news from the day is regularly exchanged around the table. There is also an expectation of attendance at the dinner table in many households, especially on Sundays and special occasions (Bryant and Wang 1990; Fiese 2006; Ralph 2013). Ten of the families interviewed felt that it was an important feature in their family togetherness. However some of the families like the Maguires, a married couple with four children aged from twenty three to fourteen explained that although sitting around the table together was very important to them, with the ages of their children from teenager to adults the ease at which they could all sit down together had diminished. They did however manage to sit down to Sunday lunch most weekends. According to Levin et al. (2012) eating together as a family seems to confer protective effects against risky behaviour in teenage boys and girls.

### *Portrait of the Maguire family*

The Maguire family, Mum, Harriet, Dad, James and four children, two adults, Shane and Sarah and two teenagers, Bradley and Elaine, Sarah as the oldest daughter does not live at home anymore but visits the family home often. This seems to have altered the mealtime routines from when the children were younger.

> *[KC] And what about the older two children in the family, do they eat meals with you in the week?*

> *[Harriet, Mum] Sarah would the come and join us the odd time, maybe once a week and Shane would spend more time  with us  in general, but because he works at meal times most days  he's a microwave kid.*

> *[KC] As the children have got older have the routines around meals have changed?*

> *[Harriet] Yes, very much so, that's one of the things I do try to do is have a meal, try to do it anyway and on Sunday as many of us that are here, that's why we would facilitate people coming and going, and if Shane is going to be here we will have the dinner at five or if he is going to be here, if James my husband is here, of course ours is very much summer and winter orientated*

*with James being around as well, because in the winter he is here at this time, in the summer he wouldn't be here until half six or seven o clock.*

*[KC] Oh right okay.*

*[Harriet] So then we adjust and we have later dinners or whatever it is, but we do try and eat as a family as many of us that are here. I feel it is very good for us to eat together and check in that everyone is ok.*

*[KC] So that is something that's important to you?*

*[Harriet] Yeah that's a routine yeah, it is yeah. We always have Sunday dinner together that is a like a religion in our house. I cook and James always does the washing up, I hate washing up those roasting trays (laughter). Then we watch the match or whatever's on.*

*[Bradley, teenage son] Sometimes, sometimes we just watch the television and sometimes we just kind of 'give out' and sit down and everyone gives out don't we?*

*[Harriet] We do yeah, if somebody has something to say, it's probably a good chance to say it. We have great debates and even arguments. But I think that is a good thing.*

The Maguire family was the family with the oldest children overall, two of the children are adults and one had left home, this seemed to have an effect on mealtime routines. Harriet explains that her daughter Sarah only joins the family occasionally for meals however she does come over for Sunday lunch. Meske et al (1994) and Blum-Kulka (1997) carried out research which indicates that Sunday lunch tended to be the key mealtime event in the week for most families. This account points to a shift in the family routines of mealtimes as the children have gotten older. This life cycle transition is clearly evident in the Maguire family's narrative about their mealtime routines which have to take account of the family member's work and study schedules rather than the rhythms associated with a family with younger children (McGoldrick and Carter 2003).

Harriet the Mum explains that having a meal together is important to her and she tries to accommodate the multiple schedules of each of her family member's

activities. She seems to take responsibility for making sure that the family sit down together at least once a week particularly on a Sunday. Harriet's acceptance that she is the person in the household who is most responsible for orchestrating family routines is supported by research findings by (Fiese 2006) and Hochschild (1989,1997) who suggest that the responsibility for routines falls most heavily on mothers in a family. A Sunday meal seems to be a solid routine for many families and this was the case for the Maguires, with Harriet describing how the family always have Sunday dinner together she cooks and her husband James washes up (Blum-Kulka 1997; Ralph 2013). By repeatedly stating and restating in a variety of ways how that she is willing to facilitate everybody's agenda in order for the family to eat together at least occasionally it is apparent that Harriet wants the listener to understand the things that are important to her. Kohler Riessman (2008:3) explains this as the desire for the speaker to communicate what is important to them 'in everyday oral storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story.'

In the middle of Harriet's story teenage son Bradley interjects and changes the direction of the narrative, Bradley explains that at mealtimes the family sometimes watch television and sometimes '*they just give out*'. Harriet extends what Bradley has just said and states that the shared family meal is an opportunity for exchange of viewpoints. Harriet's response to Bradley's comment infers that conflict negotiation can be useful in a family setting this is supported by research by Vuchinich et al. (1988) who claim that valuable skills can be learned by children and adolescents by debating and arguing with parents and siblings at mealtimes.

The Maguire family go to say that they have breakfast in relays because of the demands of competing schedules of work and catching buses to school.

> *[KC] Yeah and what about breakfast then, do you have breakfast together?*

> *[Harriet, Mum] Breakfast is in relays really isn't it? James, Elaine and I would have the first one and then Bradley comes in a bit later and Shane a little bit later again, it's just whenever they get up and if they've time they have a breakfast and if they don't they are out the door.*

*[Bradley] You just meet in the kitchen and then you have to dash, maybe you can grab something a banana or something…*

*[Elaine] or a packet of Jaffa cakes in your case Bradley… remember when you did that then you felt sick in class? (laughter).*

*[Harriet] Gone are the times when I made sure they ate up their Weetabix…(pause) of course Bradley is dairy intolerant, he knows he should not eat chocolate.*

*[Harriet] Yeah the table is here and this is where the eating is done, but it's done according to everybody's time schedule and how soon, early you have to be in, but still it's Elaine and myself and James every morning, she is the first out at eight o clock.*

This small segment illustrates that breakfast at the Maguire home is a different kind of mealtime to the evening mealtime routine or Sunday dinner. It paints a picture of a rushed morning routine that may be experienced by many families in Ireland. Harriet opens up the story by describing that breakfast is in relays, in contradiction to the Sunday dinner where everyone simultaneously shares the meal. Harriet explains how sometimes the older children rush out without breakfast if they are running late. Bradley adds to what his mother has said stating that sometimes he just takes a snack and eats it on the way to school, Elaine his younger sister extends what Bradley has said by recalling a morning when Bradley ate a whole packet of Jaffa cakes on the way to school feeling unwell afterwards, this comic tale makes everyone laugh, even Bradley. In the next line of the narrative Harriet orientates the listener again by referring back in time to when the children were younger where she would not have allowed them to go to school without a proper breakfast especially not Bradley who has to follow a special diet due to allergies. Harriet does not have the same influence over her older children's diets anymore. This segment points to how family routines can change over the life course of the family (Fiese and Wamboldt 2001; Fiese 2006; McGoldrick and Carter 2003). Harriet resolves the narrative by bringing the story up to the present explaining that it is just her and her husband James and youngest child Elaine who eat together regularly in the morning.

In regard to mealtime routines, many of the families explained that each person has a particular place to sit around the table. Each member of the family understands this concept of 'my place' at mealtimes (Fiese 2006). This point was echoed in the joint account by members of the Keyes family who in contrast to the Maguire family have young children.

### *Portrait of the Keyes Family*

The Keyes family consists of Mum Martha, Dad, Donal and three children Mairead aged twelve years, Oisin aged nine years and Aoife aged five years. Both parents work and the children all go to the same school. Martha works as a relief primary school teacher and Donal works in industry. They live in a rural location with many family pets.

> *[KC] So do you eat most of your meals in the kitchen?*
>
> *[Mairead, age twelve] Yeah, in here. Except when guests come, then we eat out there in the good dining room.*
>
> *[KC] Oh yeah I saw you've a lovely dining room there.*
>
> *[Mairead] Yeah so we are all together.*
>
> *[Martha, Mum] During the week it is just cosier in the kitchen even though the table is smaller.*
>
> *[Mairead] Everyone has their favourite place to sit, Oisin always wants to sit in the best place beside the radiator because then he can see into the sitting room and see the television while we are eating (laughter).*
>
> *[Martha] We don't have a television in the kitchen on purpose but the children argue over who has the best spot to watch their programme through the door into the sitting room.*
>
> *[Aoife, age five] I have the worst place, I can't see the television at all and I am beside the bin where the ants are! (laughter).*
>
> *[Aoife] Stop laughing!*

This dialogue highlights the sense of place that each person in family occupies at mealtimes; each member seems to know where 'their' place is around the kitchen table. Although, as Mairead the eldest daughter points out the family move to the dining room when there are guests coming to dinner. Martha the Mum in the family explains that it is cosier for the family to eat in the kitchen even though there is more physical space in the dining room. Ten of the families interviewed explained that they ate together in their kitchen most days, despite the fact that six of the families interviewed had a separate dining room. The dining room seems to be reserved for more ritual occasions like Christmas or for when guests are present. The sequence draws to a close when Mairead describes the 'best' places to sit, her younger brother Oisin apparently has the finest place as he can see the television, Mum Martha qualifies Mairead's comments buy adding that on principle they do not have a television in the kitchen nor do they allow the children to have access to watching television while eating together. However Oisin seems to get around this ruling by virtue of his position at the table. Aoife the youngest child closes the narrative with her indignant comment that she has the worst place at the table, explaining that she can has to sit next to the bin. The whole family laughs at her outburst and she is annoyed at them, shouting at them to stop laughing at her. Throughout the family interview with the Keyes family, Aoife although only age five years expresses herself clearly and strongly and makes her views heard. Arguably Aoife is very comfortable to express herself freely because she is in the naturalistic setting of her own home with her siblings and mother present (Dunn 2005). This individual space at mealtimes was also highlighted by the members of the Hanlon family. The Hanlons, a married couple with four daughters, describe their wintertime evening meals.

### Portrait of the Hanlon Family

The Hanlon Family are Mum, Ursula, Dad, Bill and their four daughters, Sile aged thirteen years, Sorcha aged eleven years, Heidi aged nine years and Ciara aged five years. Ursula is a full time student and volunteers outside the home part-time. Bill has recently been made unemployed, while he is seeking employment he is renovating their family home which is a converted barn in a rural location but beside Ursula's parents and sister. The oldest daughter Sile has just started secondary school, the next two daughters go to a local primary school and Ciara the youngest

age five goes to a Montessori preschool. The family home has a spacious kitchen with a large table, however the family explained that the kitchen was cold on winter evenings so they all ate together but sat on the sofa in the living room.

> *[KC] what about meal times, do you all sit around having your dinner together in the week?*
>
> *[Ursula, Mum] No not yet, we try to. It's very cold in our kitchen so we nearly always end up in here don't we?*
>
> *[Sile, age thirteen] That's what we did tonight.*
>
> *[Ursula] Everybody has a dish, knife and fork, you just get it yourself, we have got this comfy couch here we are sitting on; it's like just a really warm place to eat in front of the fire.*
>
> *[Heidi, age nine] It's an 'L' couch. It is shaped liked an L and we all have our places on it. Sorcha and Sile fight over who gets to sit on the best bit of the couch, next to the plug where the lap top lead fits into. I never get to sit there.*
>
> *[Ciara, age five] I sit next to Mum on the little poof and Rusty (the dog) sits next to me. Dad sits next to the door because he is the oldest.*

Similar to the Keyes family the Hanlon family all have their designated places to eat the evening meal, although in this family they eat their meals on the sofa in front of the fire. Ursula the mum explained that they have been renovating their home which is an old house and the kitchen can be very chilly on winter evenings. Ursula is keen to foster independence in her daughters and says that everyone gets their own knife and fork and dish and sits down to eat. In the middle of the sequence there is a change of direction and Heidi explains the reason behind everyone's place on the sofa. Here we get a glimpse into the relationships between the siblings when Heidi aged nine years highlights the motivation of her older sisters ages eleven and thirteen years to fight for space on the comfy couch.

This very personal account gives us insight into the delicate balance that only a younger child may be aware of. Heidi's position as middle child with two older

squabbling sisters is revealed by her choice of words ' I never get to sit there'; her response illustrates how there often is a level of 'complexity and subtlety of narrative' according to Patterson (2008:37). Ciara the youngest child makes her voice heard last, describing where she sits, between her mother and the dog but slightly away from the sofa on the 'poof' a little cushion that is part of the sofa. It seems from how she constructs her account as if her position is connected to her mother's space on the sofa. Lastly, Ciara explains that Dad sits next to the door as he is oldest, interestingly no member of the family seems to challenge this logic, it seems to be accepted as Ciara says it and the story ends. This narrative illustrates the co-construction of meaning in the family group where each person intensifies the meaning of the story of the evening meal by adding to the narrative with their views and particular memories building up a rich and complex account of the relationships between each family member (Kohler Riessman 2008).

## Morning routine

Morning routine was a topic that was discussed by seven of the families who were interviewed. Dominant themes that emerged from the families' responses were a sense of time pressure and general rushing to get things done before work and school started. From the data in the family interviews the mothers seemed to be more involved than fathers in getting the children out to school whether they were working outside the home or stay at home mothers. In the next excerpt Amina Arshad explains her morning routine. Amina works full time outside the home as does her husband. Amina takes full responsibility for her children's care and for managing the family's daily routines.

### *Portrait of the Arshad family*

The Arshad family consists of Mum Amina, Dad Nasir and two daughters Farah aged six and Razia aged four. Nasir is originally from Pakistan and Amina from Saudi Arabia, although their daughters have been born in Ireland. Both Amina and Nasir are doctors who are on call as well as working their regular hours.

> *[KC] Can you tell me about your daily routine?*

> *[Amina, Mum] I wake up at around 6.00 or 6.30 in the morning and I change my clothes, go to the bathroom and I am ready for work, get myself ready for*

*work, and then I prepare lunch for my kids and they wake up at around 7.00 or 7.15 and so does my husband and then I get them ready for school. And after breakfast we are out of the house at around 8.00 o'clock and we go to the school that is just a two minute drive from my house. And we sit in the car for about 20 minutes or 15 minutes. In the car we talk about the homework, the word list, the story she got the day before or the Quran lesson in the evening and then we, Farah and Razia, go to the school and I stand there for about 5 minutes or 10 minutes and I come out of there at 8.30 and I drop Razia, the younger one, to the Montessori. At around 8.40 I am out of there and I go to the hospital – and my work starts at 9am.*

Amina spoke at great length in her interview about the list of tasks she has to accomplish each day to keep the family's routines running smoothly, the excerpt above was only a small segment of her narrative. Amina begins her narrative by orientating the listener to the very start of the day explaining that she wakes very early to get herself then her family ready for work and school. Her husband in contrast wakes later at the same time as the children. The sense from the narrative is that it is a list of tasks that have to be executed in a timed sequence. Each step has to be completed at a set time. In the middle of the narrative the story becomes more complex, Amina explains that while she and the children wait outside school they can get another activity, the homework, done at the same time. Amina explained that her daughter's education is very important to both her and her husband. Regular and consistent homework routines create the best possible environment for children's stability and academic performance according to research by Brody and Flor (1997).

From Amina's account of her morning routine it seems she bears the responsibility for getting all the family members organised and out to school and work with lunches made and homework done, this is frequently the case according to Lefebvre (1971) who argues that the daily tasks and routines in families fall heaviest on women. Comparable to the Arshad family the Shee family in the next passage begin their busy day travelling to school and work.

### Portrait of the Shee family

The Shee family comprises of Mum Monica and her daughter Louisa aged five years. Monica was married to Louisa's father but they separated shortly after

Louisa's birth. Louisa sees her father regularly. Monica works full time, sometimes she works long hours and in addition she has to bring work home. George their cavalier king charles dog is an important member of their family. Monica's mother and niece who live in close proximity to Monica and Louisa frequently help out with childcare.

In the extract below Louisa age five begins to describe how she starts the day, she begins by explaining from her point of view what the morning routine is like. Monica the mum then clarifies that with her work routine she has to drop Louisa to the child-minders who then drops Louisa to school.

> *[KC] Can you tell what you do first when you wake up?*
>
> *[Louisa, age five] Well first Mammy wakes me then I have my Weetabix and I can get dressed by myself but mammy ties my shoes. Then we have to go, well we have to go up the hill and when Ben's mammy collects me from nannies and she brings me up and I have to go in Caroline's car.*
>
> *[Monica, Mum] Yes that's right you have your Weetabix and I have my toast. A couple of mornings if I need to be in work early, it doesn't happen very often but I drop her to my mam's, my niece picks her up there and drops her to school.*
>
> *[KC] Oh right okay.*
>
> *[Monica] What do we always do in the morning Louisa?*
>
> *[Louisa] ehm..*
>
> *[Louisa] Oh Yeah! I get to let George (the dog) out in the garden for a pee, he runs and runs around!!*
>
> *[Monica] and then we have to rush because mammy has to be in for eight or half eight, which has only just happened recently, but the rest of the time I bring her to school myself.*
>
> *[Louisa] I love it when you bring me because we don't have to go so early and I can watch cartoons while George (the dog) has his breakfast.*

Although Louisa is only five years old she was clearly able to articulate what happens in the mornings at her house. In this segment Mum Monica adds her response to what Louisa has said about the morning routine, this is a very good illustration of conversation building for Louisa, as her mother listens to her version of events and prompts her to add her voice, about their joint routines, this is a key aspect of socialisation for younger family members according to Fiese and Wamboldt (2006) also Light and Littleton (1999). During the interview Monica was very patient and encouraged Louisa to express her views on many of the interview topics. This 'scaffolding effect' emboldened Louisa to contribute significantly to the family interview even at such a young age (Vygotsky 1978). The Lawlor family in the next extract express a similar degree of busy activity first thing in the morning.

***Portrait of the Lawlor family***

This family comprises of Mum Mandy and her twin daughters Ali and Grace aged five years. Mandy was in a relationship with Ali and Grace's Dad but they separated when the girls were a few months old. Ali and Grace see their father frequently, though he did not take part in the interview. Mandy's mother and sisters play a very active and supportive role in the Lawlor family's life and routine. In response to my question 'Can you tell me how your typical day starts?' Mandy responds with,

> *[Mandy, Mum] Yeah oh yes it's all like clockwork during the week for school, we get up, we come downstairs, we put on our uniforms, have our breakfast, get the lunch boxes ready, wash our teeth –*

> *[KC] Do you do the lunch box in the evening or ...?*

> *[Mandy] No, in the morning. But I do everything else the night before, get the uniforms ready and the schoolbags as it is always a rush to get out the door.*

Mandy, the Mum in this excerpt describes how in her home time runs 'like clockwork', we get the sense of a busy full life where each activity has to move along in sequence to keep the family supported and everyone's needs met. According to Elias (1992) time is a construction that individuals create and understand through the need for synchronised activity such as routines. Mandy ends the account by using another phrase that implies that time is lived quickly in the morning 'it's a rush to get out the door'. It seems to be a key aspect for many of the

families that being organised was the most important ingredient for routines running smoothly. Six of the families reported that the morning routine was the most time pressured, however the Keyes family explained that being organised was the key to success. The Keyes family consists of Martha and Donal who are married and have three children Mairead aged twelve years, Oisin aged nine years and Aoife aged five years.

*[KC] So how is the routine in the morning?*

*[Martha, Mum] Do you know what we are not too bad. Because you know they all have their own alarm clock, a method which used to work, but not anymore. I said why don't you set your alarm clock?..... But lately I realise that the clocks are there for decoration because they have discovered their snooze buttons (laughter).*

*[Mairead, age twelve] Oh I just love the snooze button!*

*[Oisin, age nine] No I just turn mine off (laughter).*

*[Martha] No it's not too bad, I do as much of it the night before as I can you know. The uniforms are all hanging up, their shoes are there with their bags in the morning and the lunch, anything that is not perishable is in the lunch box. The morning I'm working now alright I'll have to get up a bit early. I just get up to get myself ready. But no it's not too bad now.*

In the above piece two of the Keyes family children add to the account of the morning routine reinforcing what their mother Martha says at the outset. Arguably this gives a more nuanced and multi perspective account, the family narrative is co constructed within the conversation between Martha and her children (Andrews et al. 2008). Now that the children are school aged Martha was keen to stress that she is trying to give the children more responsibility for their own morning routine by providing then with their own alarm clocks. This had variable results but was a humorous segment. At this stage of their development Mairead age twelve and Oisin age nine are being encouraged by their mother to manage their own morning routine, whereas Aoife age five is not at this stage yet. According to Fiese and Wamboldt (2000) and McGoldrick and Carter (2003) individual responsibility for routines varies over the life cycle.

The Hanlon family agree that being organised lends to a smooth experience in the morning with each member being clear of what their role is. Even though the Hanlons have four daughters in three different schools they seem to have worked out a reasonably satisfactory morning and afternoon routine with the support of their wider family. Ursula's parents live next door to the family home.

> *[KC] Do you find that's tricky in the morning as well?*
>
> *[Ursula, Mum] No not at all, – Sile goes, gets the bus in, or Bill (husband) brings her in, the girls then get the bus at half eight and myself and Ciara are on the road for nine o clock aren't we? Ciara goes into school, I go to the gym, I pick her up on the way home, and we are home.*
>
> *[KC] Oh right okay.*
>
> *[Ciara] Mum picks me up first and sometimes we go to the shop and buy sweets and bread on the way home.*
>
> *[Ursula] And that's kind of the routine that we are into, I get some groceries and then Sile gets the bus home, the girls get the bus to the door and only on a Tuesday when I'm in Foroige they have to come home themselves and there's normally bread rolls and they start their homework and then daddy is in or granny is here or. So they are really really pretty self-sufficient. Like it's fairly straight forward and we are used to it.*

Similar to the Keyes family in the previous extract the Hanlon children are at a comparable stage of the life cycle. The children are all in school during the day and gradually gaining more independence and as such are more able to help out with the family routines. The youngest child Ciara sees more of her mother during the day as compared to her older siblings who sometimes are '*really really self-sufficient*' according to Ursula, helping themselves to a snack after school and starting their homework even if Ursula is not at home. This passage illustrates how routines are both flexible depending on what the parent's schedules are and also influenced by the developmental stages of the children in the household (Fiese 2006). According to Larson et al. (2001) individual family routines although shifting with the ages of the children still confer structure and stability for older children in the family, especially

if they are involved in carrying the routines out as seems to be the case with the older Hanlon girls. In the last piece of the extract granny is mentioned as playing a part in the family's after school routine, demonstrating how routines often require wider family support to function, routines appear to be embedded with family networks (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The next section focuses on how family routines are sustained by individuals outside of the immediate family.

## Support for busy family routines

Seven of the families spoke about how they regularly relied on wider family, grandparents in particular, for support with school collections or occasional child-minding. As a separated parent Monica Shee expresses that sometimes she needs to draw on support from wider family to help with the daily work and school routine. In response to my question 'How do you manage the day to day routines with your work schedule?' Monica replies that,

> *[Monica, Mum]  There is some travel involved in the day but usually in the city or country. Although, sometimes I travel to the west of the county so I can be gone for a long stretch and I have to rush back to pick up Louisa. It can be a bit of a panic.*

> *[KC]  I see*

> *[Monica] At times her dad picks her up, usually two evenings a week and the rest of the time, the other three then I pick her up, so well I try and pick her up, if I don't, I have a great back up  my nieces are a great support.*

> *[KC] Oh right okay.*

> *[Monica] I talk to Dan (ex-husband) nearly every day to fix up some detail or other about Louisa, where her swimming bag is, whether she has a half day from school. All those things.*

> *[Monica] If I do get delayed which I can do if it's not planned and Dan is not picking her up that day then  it is great to have family to fall back on yeah, so yeah sure we are usually here about half five.*

Monica spoke of how she needs to keep in constant communication with her ex-husband Dan in order to make sure that Louisa aged five is picked up from her child minders on the days that she can't make it. Ramey and Juliusson (1998) claim that separated parents endeavour to communicate childcare arrangements more clearly to their separated partner as compared married or co-habiting couples. Each of the four separated families in this study reported that they put a great deal of effort into communicating with their child/children's other parent regarding routines involving their children.

Monica explained that she has a safety net of her wider family to fall back on which has influenced her to live near relatives for the additional support she receives from them. Monica stated that she and her daughter have a better quality of life with their involvement with her extended family, an illustration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model which suggests that children develop not just with their parents' support but rather with the support of wider family and local communities. Likewise Sharon Walsh in the extract below speaks how important it is to her and her son Jeff to spend time together as they are apart four days a week. Sharon depends on her mother Celine and another friend with her day to day routines.

### *Portrait of the Walsh family*

Sharon is a thirty one year old single Mum to Jeff aged nine years. Sharon was in a relationship with Jeff's father but was never married. Jeff sees his father frequently and they have a close relationship. Sharon has recently started a full time course at a Dublin University so she is away from home Monday to Thursday. Sharon and Jeff live in their own home in the South East of Ireland at weekends but during the week Jeff moves between a friend's home and his Grandmother Celine's home while Sharon lives with her boyfriend Mike in Dublin while she is in college.

> *[KC] Can you tell me about a typical workday routine?*

> *[Sharon, Mum] When I'm in Dublin my week days are very much about just getting myself up, getting myself organised, getting into college, being tired just coming home, studying, spending time with my boyfriend who I'm living with and then getting in the car on a Thursday and driving back down to Waterford and spending Thursday night until the Monday morning with Jeff. I feel so excited when I am about halfway home it is the best moment of the*

*week, looking forward to just being with him. The weekends then will be about us doing stuff together, me seeing how his school work has gone during the week, seeing if we need to go over anything. Washing, any assignments I have to do, organising them for the following week, organising him, organising his stuff, my stuff, that's pretty much it, it's just all go. Yeah down here it doesn't stop and then I'm always trying to do something whether like we go to the cinema one night or we go for a walk or we bake something or always trying to make sure that we do something together. Something, it doesn't, whatever it is ... even if it's just going to the shops together, we go to Tesco's together and get him to pick out his food for the following week or we'll hang around there, he'll show me the games or. We do a lot, we hang out a lot together anyway.*

In this story Sharon seems to have a dual identity, that of a busy student and also a busy mother to her son Jeff. Her narrative begins by describing her daily routine in her Dublin life, studying, being tired, spending time with her boyfriend. In the middle of the narrative we see a complicating action where Sharon explains that on Thursday she drives to the south east of the country to the home she shares with her son (Labov 1982). The complicating action here relates to the main part of the story, Sharon being reunited with her son Jeff. Mishler (1986:237) calls this crucial storyline the 'skeleton plot', the fundamental message in the story. Sharon describes this time 'as the best moment of the week'. The second half of the narrative is dominated with Sharon's description of her time with Jeff, mundane and ordinary activities, such as washing or shopping for groceries, but the vital part is that Sharon always makes time to do something together. These ordinary routines are possibly significant for keeping a sense of normality and stability in a time of change and upheaval (Budescu and Taylor 2013; Evans et al. 2005; Fiese at al.2002; Taylor 1996).

Sharon explains that Jeff has quite a bit of adjustment during the week with her new course one hundred miles away.

> *[KC] How has your routine changed during the week now that you are doing the course?*

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*[Sharon, Mum] Yeah that hasn't changed and he's not moved towns and he's still pretty much doing the same things, my friend whom he stays with on a Wednesday her son is in his class and they sleep over, he sleeps over in her house on a Wednesday night and she lives in the same estate as us ...*

*... two minutes from our house and you know he goes to another friend on a Thursday just after school because I'm home on the Thursday and I'd usually be home by about six and so he goes there and that's one of his best friends, Luke, they're also in the same class. You like being with Luke don't you Jeff?*

*[Jeff, age nine] I love being at Luke's house he has an Xbox with loads of great games*

*[Sharon] So the only two days a week, the Monday and the Tuesday are the toughest for him because he's sleeping over in, in his nana's and he's not, he wouldn't really ever have slept there much that's the biggest thing ...*

From this piece it can be seen that Sharon depends very much on her friend and her mother for support in looking after Jeff while she is away in Dublin studying. Although Sharon stresses that Jeff is '*still doing pretty much the same things*', this statement appears to suggest that Sharon is conscious of creating stability for her son in a time of flux in her career. Sharon was keen for Jeff to remain in the same school even if she moved away during the week as he was recently diagnosed as having dyslexia and the school he has been attending has offered him excellent support. Maintenance of stable school and homework routines in associated with optimal academic performance and child well -being according to Reppetti et al. (2002) and Taylor and Lopez (2005). About midway through Sharon's narrative after she has outlined that her son stays with his friend Luke when she is away Sharon invites a response from her son by saying '*You like being with Luke don't you Jeff?*' this particular sentence sounds like a question and statement combined. Arguably it is phrased as a statement where Sharon is seeking reassurance from Jeff but quite tentatively. Jeff does respond to Sharon's question in an optimistic manner saying he loves being at Luke's house because he has an Xbox. Sharon ends the story by explaining that Jeff sometimes stays with his grandmother too although that those are his toughest days, the piece closes on this rather wistful note and it gives an insight into the complexities and uniqueness of family routines (Fiese 2006).

## Bedtime routine

Bedtime routine was discussed by seven of the families. These routines arguably provide a framework whereby the children know what to expect and the adults can focus on some leisure time for themselves; a different quality of time in the evening. The bedtime routines of the families tended to vary with the ages of the children. Below Amina Arshad describes her evening routine with her two daughters who are aged four and six. Amina explained that she and her husband take turns reading to their daughters and rarely miss a night of story reading. They explained that this is a very important tradition in their home.

> *[KC] Can you tell me about your evening routine?*
>
> *[Amina, Mum] They brush their teeth and change their clothes and read the story to them in their beds, the girls choose often the same one each night and then go to sleep. My husband and I take turns to read them the story I always enjoy it because the girls love to be read to. And that is all after our evening meal – from 9.00 onwards that is our time, me and my husband have for ourselves, we either sit down and talk or he does his work on the laptop or I do a little bit of reading or preparing some presentation for the hospital and we are in bed as well at about 11.00 o'clock. That's the usual day. Ready to start the same thing over again (laughter).*

This extract seems to have two themes, the ordinary practical aspects of getting the children to bed such as cleaning teeth and getting into night clothes and the theme of personal time together as a couple after a long day.  Amina mentions that she loves reading to her daughters and that they often choose the same story. Reading stories at bedtime is a good way to relax children and reinforces bedtime routines in a pleasurable manner according to (Burke et al 2004). Furthermore Burke at al. (2004) suggest that set bedtime routines including a story can lessen night-time awakenings in young children. Interestingly, a piece of research by Kuhn and Weidinger (2000) suggests that bedtime stories relax parents who are reading the stories as well as the children being read to, the children according to the research are less irritable and fractious at bedtime also. Reading stories at bedtime was mentioned by six out of the twelve families who were interviewed, almost all the families with younger children aged nine years or under. The second theme of this narrative is when Amina

introduces the subject of her and her husband having some time together after the girls are asleep. Although their time together alone seems to be busy working and preparing for the next day, there seems to be little time for leisure. Lack of time and feel hurried are common in many families according to Elkind, (1981), furthermore Daly (2001) argues that modern families are under time pressure with work and school routines. Amina ends with an apt sentence that neatly summarises her narrative; *'Ready to start the whole thing over again'* thus illustrating the repetitive nature of family routines.

Some of the children who were interviewed were keen to express their thoughts on the evening routine. Isla Golden was a very vocal and competent interviewee about her and her sister's favourite stories even though she is only five years old.

### *Portrait of the Golden family*

The Golden family consists of Mum Annika, Dad Brendan, daughter Isla aged five years and daughter Milly aged two. Annika's mother and step-father live with the family in a three storey house in an urban area. Annika and her parents are Swedish nationals Brendan is Irish. The family speak Swedish and English at home. Isla explains what happens at bedtime and goes on to describe how the routine is different for her sister Milly.

> *[KC]  Do you have a story before bed?*
>
> *[Isla, age five] Yeah we do every night.*
>
> *[KC]   Every night and who reads the story?*
>
> *[Isla]  My mum or my dad or my grandad or my nana.*
>
> *[KC]   And have you any favourite books or favourite stories?*
>
> *[Isla]  Well my favourite story is Sleeping Beauty.*
>
> *[KC]   Oh that's a lovely story and do you have the same story every night?*
>
> *[Isla]  Well sometimes I have the same.*
>
> *[KC]   And what about Milly, does she like bedtime stories?*
>
> *[Isla]  Yeah will I tell you her favourite?*

*[KC]   Okay tell me.*

*[Isla]   Lonely Hearts.*

*[KC]   Lonely Hearts and what's lonely Hearts about?*

*[Isla]   About a troll who is very scary but in the end he is nice and he saves the little girl, sometimes I even fall asleep before the end of the story!*

*[KC]   And do you and Milly go to bed at the same time?*

*[Isla] Well when it was my dad's turn to read the story Milly has to go to sleep with my mum downstairs and then when it's my mum's turn she has to go downstairs when I'm asleep and then give her a breast feed.*

Stories told by young children are very often collaborations between them and their parents (Engel 2005), however in this case Isla independently explained the narrative of her and her sister's bedtime. There seems to be two strands to this story one where Isla narrates the tale of being told the story, ending with the fact that sometimes she even falls asleep before the story is finished. The second strand relates to the parenting practices of her Mum and Dad, when Mum reads her a story she has to leave to breastfeed her sister, here we catch a glimpse of Isla's world from her perspective. Isla understands the difference between her bedtime routine and her younger sister's and she is able to articulate this to the listener, displaying a high level of agency (Corsaro 2005).

Some of the parents expressed that they needed time in the evening to get extra work done and that was done after the children were asleep, so it was important that their little ones settled down to sleep peacefully fairly early in the evening. Monica Shee a single mother to Louisa explains that she needs to do work after hours because the day has been so hectic. In response to my question *'do you have of set routine for the week, for instance getting up at a certain time or going to bed at a certain time?*

*[Monica, Mum] Yes up very early, 7 am or before yeah. I would say usually the day is so hectic and you don't get a lunch, you know. I bring work home some of the time, once she's gone to bed. We have a routine with herself but she's usually in bed at half seven, eight. We have a snack together, then a*

*little cuddle in her bed and her favourite story. And then I'm often so tired I don't usually last longer than kind of half nine, ten myself.*

Monica Shee expresses that the day is so pressured that she struggles to find time to eat lunch some days despite being up very early. Managing work-family balance can be significant source of time pressure, for parents with young children. Although both mothers and fathers are affected by time pressure in balancing home and work routines, mothers were more likely to experience time pressure from the obligations to family, whereas, fathers felt more pressured in relation to work commitments (Baxter 2009, 2010). This is in keeping with earlier research which has indicated that mothers with young children often experience time pressure because of the amount of paid and unpaid work that it is a feature of this stage of the family life cycle (Bittman and Rice 2002; Gunthorpe and Lyons 2004; Pocock et al. 2007). Monica closes the segment by saying that after a little cuddle with Louisa her daughter she is so tired she goes to bed herself, leaving her with little time for leisure or even to wind down after a busy day. Monica's choice of words **'**a little cuddle in her bed' in relation to the time she spends with Louisa after a busy day points to a very intimate and close family time with her daughter that fosters a close bond between them (Gabb 2008).

## Busy routines

Frequently the families who were interviewed spoke about how busy their daytime routines could become with the school routine and after school activities of older children. Below the Keyes family speak about the range of after school activities that the children do and how much scheduling Martha has to commit to organise these.

*[KC] Do the children do many after school activities?*

*[Martha, Mum] I think it's just the kind of age group of the family, that trying to keep everybody happy. Yeah and it's just that one day that they have that much stuff. Sometimes we have to do the homework in the car and have a little snack too.*

*[Oisin, age nine] It's always the way that it occurs on the one day.*

*[Martha] Mairead has music on a Wednesday as well, she loves Comhhaltas\* and then there is drama for Aoife and soccer for Oisin and that is just Wednesday.*

*[KC] And where's that Mairead?*

*[Mairead] It's in town and my teacher Maura K she's amazing, she can play nearly every instrument, you ask her to play and she will say oh I have that, I can play that, she's really good, piano, flute, keyboard or something. So I would hate to give it up.*

\*Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann - an organisation dedicated to the promotion of Irish music song and dance

Martha Keyes explained that she is very keen for her children to have opportunities that she did not have growing up and as such tries to involve them in as many activities as the children are interested in and as much as time will allow. Martha seems to have to synchronise everyone's commitments so that each activity can be fulfilled. Synchronising of family routines in order to find leisure time that coincides with each other's routines can be difficult according to Snawerdt (2002). The Hanlon family members expressed similar thoughts. Mum and Dad Ursula and Bill describe the difficulties in keeping all the activities going with their four daughters who all enjoy different interests. Recently they made a decision to reduce the number of activities during the working and school week. This reflects the recent economic turndown as well as the wish to have a less hectic routine.

*[Ursula, Mum] Yeah we used to do a lot during the week but it took too much and so we changed a lot of the activities to Saturday's. Whereas Sile's dancing is during the week and everything else goes on Saturday and Sunday ....where we can share lifts and mum and dad help us out as well and you know, we kind of go in two opposite directions.*

*[KC] Yeah.*

*[Ursula] No seriously it's fairly hard now to get everything in as well even on the weekends. The horse riding and the gymnastics both start at nine thirty on a Saturday.*

*[Bill, Dad] It is difficult to be in two places at the one time with you know the school routines, because we have three different schools you know.*

Ursula and Bill both outline how it takes them and Ursula's parents to sustain the busy after school activities of their daughters. The family also car pool with two other families to share the workload of getting the children to and from their activities.

## School Routines

When asked about morning routines the families often referred to travelling to school in the rush hour and how this was quite stressful. Here Amina discusses her plan for getting her daughter Farah aged five to school and getting Razia aged two and a half to crèche in time for her to be parked at work at the hospital before 9am where she is a doctor. She suggests that she cannot be flexible with this routine if she is to get everybody to their rightful destination on time. The key to the success of the morning routine according to Amina is to get to one particular parking spot in front of the school in the morning. The theme of travelling in the car together was a strong theme in the research and will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

*[KC] Can you tell me some more about the school routine?*

*[Amina, Mum] I get to the girls school very early I leave at 7.50am – to avoid the traffic first of all and the basic reason is you know there is a U-turn there and just in front of the lolly pop lady there is a space there ...*

*[KC] Yes.*

*[Amina]..and if I get that space in the morning and I drop her there then I'm going to be back to the hospital, I can just come out of there and drive straight out. I by-pass all the traffic and everything from that particular space (laughter).*

*[KC] So it's worth it to get going so early?*

*[Amina] Yes it's definitely worth it, I drive with them in the car and I have no problem afterwards and that is the one particular space yes.*

*[KC]   So what if your morning – you're a bit later and you leave at say 8.20?*

*[Amina] I can't tolerate it– I can't afford that.*

*[KC]   No? So are you ever tired at 6.30?*

*[Amina] Oh definitely. Definitely, very tired at times really, very tired at times but you just have to keep going.*

It is clear from this excerpt that the demands of work and school dictate the morning routine for Amina and her family. There is a sense of time pressure and hurriedness. This is especially evident when Amina vehemently states 'I can't tolerate it' in relation to any potential delay in her routine in the morning. It is as if the key to the smooth running of her family routines is dictated by the clock down to the last minute even if this pressure of time leaves her feeling exhausted. According to Baxter (2009, 2010) very firm family routines can lead to a feeling of time pressure and in addition cause frustration if these routines are beset with problems or delays, for example if Amina does not reach her 'space' at the school in time. At the close of the narrative Amina pragmatically explains that 'you just have to keep going' despite feeling tired.

Some families have made a philosophical decision to take a different approach, in the next extract the Barrett family explain their educational routines which do not involve school.

## Flexible routines

Although many of the families explained that school routines with young children imposed somewhat rigid routines. Some families like the Barretts felt that home schooling afforded a break from some the traditional routines that arguably bind many families (Fiese 2006). The Barretts only had to use their car if they chose too for educational purposes although Joseph has to drive to work.

***Portrait of the Barrett Family***

The Barrett family consists of married couple Agnes and Joseph and their two daughters Erica aged seven and Rebecca aged four. The Barretts home school their daughters and live in the countryside where they keep hens and pigs as well as the family pets. Joseph works as a teacher and Agnes is a full time Mum. Agnes explains that their home life routine is very flexible and fits around their needs. The focus is on home schooling in a relaxed unstructured manner.

> *[KC] Can you tell me what is your week day routine like?*

> *[Agnes, Mum]  It's very very flexible, very flexible. We usually start the day with stories, the girls come in, or Rebecca might come into the bed during the night or she will come in first thing in the morning and so will Erica and Joseph gets up and comes down and lets out the dogs. I stay sitting in the bed with the girls and we read stories and now they are older we would have a chapter of, a book with chapters, it's kind of we read one, two chapters depending on the weather and then we will have breakfast and the girls kind of go up and we do the hens and pony, let them out and feed them, give them clean water, collect the eggs and the girls do that pretty much every day, that's their thing, it's the hens and the money from the eggs goes to mainly the pony. So that's very much something that they do and you know and Erica is quite proficient at it, they can feed the hens by themselves, like I could stay here and they will go up and they will slip up at the gate a bit but if they can open the gate Erica was able to let them out and feed them, make sure they've water, collect the eggs and do all of that.*

Agnes's long narrative about the week day routine begins with her orientating us to the very start of her day. From Agnes's choice of words a picture of intimate family life emerges with the girls reading stories with their mum in bed. These moments of family belonging were evident in many of the family narratives, a window into the close bonds of affection that tie families together (Yuval - Davies 2006).  According to Gabb (2010:74) 'in contemporary Western society the parent-child relationship has become one of ongoing negotiation and intimate knowing'. Agnes spends a lot of time with her daughters during the day she explains that they move at the pace that suits them not restricted by outside routines imposed by school. Sometimes

Agnes works with other parents to organise educational activities for the children. Here she explains how the families liaise with other families to create a stimulating environment for the children.

> *[Agnes] Yeah we work with others, every two weeks we go to the nearest town which is an hour and 15 minutes. But we would pack a large picnic and you know we go for 11 and we are not leaving until half three, four o clock, and there are lots of things to do, we do arts and crafts and we have organised a book club and stuff like that, so I would try. Relatively speaking their life is quite unstructured, it's quite loose, and it's quite relaxed perhaps. They are all the things we do but there's no order in which they have to be done.*

> *....So if they choose not to come for the walk you can go to granny or and like that we might say we will go down for half an hour, we could end up being there for two hours and dinner is not till seven o clock that's okay, it doesn't really matter, so be it.*
> *So it's very flexible and that's the big appeal for me, it's very flexible. Nothing is done for a set time no. No homework, the day doesn't revolve around the school timetable. Yeah it's not this externalised structure. You pretty much do what you want, when you want.*

Agnes describes how she works with others to create very child-centred activities for the children, she goes on to explains how her children are often free to choose what they want to do and to follow their own interest. Their family life appears to move to their own rhythm, mealtime routines are orchestrated to fit around their desired activities, as Agnes says not controlled by homework and *'this externalised structure'*.

Other families also explained that they would ideally like a home life that was not dominated by external routines. For example the Golden family, Annika and Brendan and their daughters Isla aged six and Milly aged two and a half. Both parents had considered home- schooling their daughters feeling that a more flexible routine might suit their family better, but their daughter Isla expressed to them that she wanted to go to school.

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*[KC]  Can you tell me a little more about your family routines?*

*[Annika]  I think school imposes quite a lot of routines.*

*[Brendan]  Even more than work, I think it's somewhat, well if you have nine to five in work fair enough but you can sometimes have a little bit more flexibility, school is very inflexible.*

*[Annika] It's very inflexible and we were really humming and hawing for many years whether we would send them to school you know at all or whether we would home school, but Isla she didn't want to be home schooled, she wanted to go to school so we thought okay. So she goes to the local school and she loves it.*

*[Isla] I love school… I wanted to see my friends, I told mummy I want to go to school (laughter).*

In the excerpt Annika the mum opens up the dialogue with her remark that she thinks school imposes a lot of routines, arguably she is referring to perceived time restrictions within a school timetable. Brendan speaks next and extends what his partner has said expressing that school can be even more restrictive time-wise that work. Annika further amplifies and echoes what Brendan has just said by repeating 'It's very inflexible'. This building in amplification of a shared viewpoint was a common occurrence in the family interviews when the dialogue was jointly constructed (Kohler Riessman 2008). Annika explains that Isla expressed her wishes that she did not want to be home-schooled so her parents capitulated and Isla now goes to school. Isla closes the account by adding her voice acknowledging what her mother has said amplifying the remarks mother has used when she says '*I love school'*. Brendan and Annika regard Isla's views as paramount, quite a break from traditions where children were seen and not heard, in contradiction to the more democratic approach taken by many parents of most modern families (Giddens 1999). This short narrative exchange between two parents and their daughter uncovers the relational experience between the individuals and how they impact on one another when making key decisions for their lives, they seem to value an emotional closeness between themselves and their daughter (Gabb 2009).

A key theme that emerged during the family interviews was the qualitative difference in feeling of time spent in the family at the weekend rather than the week (Daly 2001). Eight of the twelve families referred to this aspect. The families expressed a sense of freedom from the routines of work and school but some parents worked shifts, or worked in the medical profession so were on call at the weekend. Families with teenagers remarked that their children tended to sleep more at weekends-*'I only get up if I need to'* (Elaine aged sixteen). Religious observance was described by several of the families and this tended to be an important aspect of the weekend also. Although this adherence to religious routines such as going to Mass on Sunday can be more difficult as the children become adolescents. This is referred to in the interview with the Maguire family in this section.

Four of the fathers who participated in the family interviews stated that the weekends provided an opportunity to spend more time with their children. Research conducted by Hook and Wolfe (2012) indicates that fathers do spend considerably more time involved in hands on childcare and playing with children at the weekends. Brendan and Annika Golden explain what a typical weekend routine is like for them, Brendan emphasises that he is keen to spend time with his daughters. In answer to my question *'do you have a different routine at the weekend?'* Brendan Golden replies

> *[Brendan, Dad] Yeah it's more, there's no real routine at the weekend, well I study some Saturdays so it throws things about a bit because I'd be away all day, Saturdays in the school year, some Saturday's, but there's no routine really as such. No, no I mean on school day's we sometimes have to wake Isla up because she's so fast asleep but not on weekends we don't wake her. It is great to be able to just play with the girls, even if it is playing' littlest pet shop' (laughter).*

> *[Annika, Mum] Oh she gets to sleep until she gets up yeah, both of them do, Isla kind of gets woken up. Milly gets woken up by default now when we get Isla up but on weekends we just kind of, whoever wakes up first then we kind of just sneak downstairs. So whoever can sleep longer can stay until they wake up by themselves which feels just great.*

In this piece of narrative we glimpse a world where time feels different and much less hurried according to Brendan. He gets the opportunity to be actively engaged

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with his daughters more than he is able to during the week (Hook and Wolfe 2012). Less work and study means more time to play for parents and children, arguably enhancing quality of life according to Daly (2007). In addition, longer working hours, extensive commuting and other external demands can impact negatively on families (Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Barnardos 2008).

The O' Brien family echoed the sentiments of the Golden family outlining that a break from schedules is welcome for the family at weekends.

### Portrait of the O'Brien family

In the O Brien Family, Jennifer is Mum to three children, Jill aged twelve years, and twins Adam and Amy aged eight years. Jennifer and the children's Dad are separated and the children see their Dad. The children all go to the same school but have many after school activities during the week so the routine is full and needs to be planned along with Jennifer's work commitments.

> [KC] Does the weekend routine differ from that of the week?
>
> [Jennifer, Mum] Yeah. And I'm Jennifer, I'm mammy in this house, mammy, fix-it person, driver, everything but when you ask about the Saturday this is probably the first year that we have had Saturday at home. Yeah? Is that right? Yeah we had dancing last year didn't we? Yeah. So for us and for me it's a lovely time, you know, so Saturday morning could be for anything. There isn't a set routine, it's unscheduled'
>
> [KC]  And do you have particular feelings about – glad it's unscheduled?
>
> [Jennifer] It's great isn't it? Yeah. We go to mass though.
>
> [KC] On Saturday?
>
> [Jill, age twelve] Yeah. Yeah, all of us.
>
> [Jennifer] But Saturday morning we now have a morning where we can lie in as in ... and relax ... and relax, yeah.
>
> [Amy, age eight] Sometimes we go out and go shopping.

The O'Briens show the transition to a more relaxed pace at the weekend after a busy week and how Mum Jennifer in particular appreciates this change. This is comparable to the experience of the Hanlons, both families are similar in terms of their commitments and both families have children of broadly the same age. Arguably this sense of time pressure during the week is a combination of external pressures from work and school and internal pressure, the desire of the children to take part in after school activities.

The Keyes family below describe how their weekends unfold interestingly in this piece Martha, Mairead and Oisin all construct the story about how Mairead likes to have a lie in on a Saturday morning. They refer in their account to family memories such as Oisin getting a trumpet for Christmas one year.

> *[KC] Do you think the routines of the week are kind of busier than the weekend?*
>
> *[Martha, Mum]  Oh without a doubt. Well the week is really kind of hectic you know.*
>
> *[Martha]  Isn't it? Yeah. So we try and keep the weekend as relaxed as possible. Well Oisin does rugby on a Saturday morning and usually a match on Sunday morning, but by lunch time they are finished you know.*
>
> *[Oisin, age nine] I play a lot of matches around Munster and some parts of Leinster. My dad always brings me up to all the matches, unless it's up in Dublin or somewhere I go by bus.*
>
> *[Mairead, age twelve] Usually I wake up by the time he comes back.*
>
> *[Martha] Yeah Mairead is at the age now where she has a lie in. Well you see this is the teenage brain.*
>
> *[Mairead] She wakes me up by pouring water on me.*
>
> *[Martha] No I do a song and dance routine.*
>
> *[Mairead] But I don't like it!*

*[Martha] Singing in the rain. And then in the end because you wouldn't get up you know we used the trumpet (laughter).When he was small Oisin had this trumpet and he used to play it. He got it from Santa and every morning he would wake us up with the trumpet!*

This extract illustrates that although on the surface this narrative is a response to a question about routines, it has a subtext allowing mum and daughter to express conflict over the wake up time in the morning, this is done via the weaving of a humorous tale. Son Oisin is present but only on the periphery of the main theme, in the joint remembering of the event by Mum and Mairead when he was playing the trumpet. Narrative is a form of social code, assuming that stories are dialogically constructed between individuals (Bakhtin 1981). There is a very strong sense of shared memories and belonging in this account. The family can reinforce it's own particular identity by the telling and retelling of stories. Further to this point Yuval - Davies (2006: 201) states that 'identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (are who they are not)' this identity construction is constantly revised according to Yuval - Davies, 'always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong'.

Single Mum Monica Shee and her daughter Louisa described that although they wake at the same time at the weekend the feeling of spending time together on Saturday and Sunday was different.

*[KC] And do you find then the routine is a lot different on the weekend?*

*[Monica, Mum] Yeah absolutely I think it's just the fact that, okay we might be up at the same time, because you know they tend not to change that much when they are in the school routine they are usually and they are up early, she's up early, she's up at seven. And sometimes we go swimming.*

*[Louisa] And we go and buy ice creams after swimming.*

*[KC] Oh right okay.*

*[Monica] Or it depends just bring the dog out or and go shopping, do the shop, do the weekly shop or go to my mother's at some stage, we put in an appearance over the weekend, usually for Sunday dinner, or depending on,*

*I've started bringing her to the children's mass in our local church at half nine, so kind of every weekend is different, I don't really have a set routine.*

*[KC] And do you enjoy the flexibility?*

*[Monica] Yeah absolutely or like you know just deciding well no actually we are not going to do a hell of a lot, do you know, we will just get up and we will see what the day brings kind of thing. Do you know or if someone calls. I think you stick to such a routine during the week, it is lovely not to have to schedule stuff at the weekend.*

Monica describes this theme of enjoyment at the lack of schedules which was talked about by many of the families. In her narrative she mentions '*Sunday dinner'* and '*mass'* which are key features of the weekend for many of the families who were interviewed. Mandy, Mum to the Lawlor family in the quote below expresses similar thoughts to Monica. The same waking routine extends from the weekday to the weekends however there is time to '*loll about'* and relax a bit more with no school to rush to. Monica's daughter Louisa and Mandy's twin daughters Ali and Grace are all aged five, so arguably the children are at a similar developmental stage and this is apparent in their biological clocks (Fiese 2006).

In response to my question, *'do you have a different routine like at the weekend to the week?'* Mandy Mum to the Lawlor family stated that…*'Not really no, we can stay up a little bit later on the Saturday night for the television programme X Factor, that's the only difference and wake up time is the same but we do loll about and we chat in bed on the Saturday, yeah'.*

Mandy explains that for a treat the girls age five are allowed to stay up late in order for the family to watch their favourite programme together. Watching television as a group was a subject that was talked about by eleven out of twelve of the families. Silverstone (1993) states that the use of technology inexorably effects the time and space that families spend together, this leads to family time having a characteristic feel and sense of security. Additionally, Silverstone (1993) states that television programmes can structure how the day is organised for many families, the evening meal may have to be concluded so that a particular programme can be viewed. Ventura (1995) claims that in order to explore family time we have to consider the

family and their use of television. Daly (1996) argues that family television watching confers a feeling of solidarity and togetherness for example watching a popular programme or sports event as a family. Conversation and debate continues in a family even when the television is on and there is frequently debate about the programme being watched according to Kubey (1990b). There has however been a shift away from television at the centre of the family (Morley 1986) to televisions in other areas of the home such as the bedroom (Livingstone 2009). Six of the families who were interviewed stated that they would not allow their children to have televisions in their bedrooms, although each of these six families had younger children. The responses from the families in this study seem to indicate that there are unwritten rules around the use of the television, especially in relation to the scheduling of time in the day for watching particular programmes (Wood and Beck 1994).

However the developmental stage of the children is different in the Maguire family with the two remaining children at home Bradley aged seventeen and Elaine aged fifteen quite unlike the two previous families. In the next excerpt the teenagers in the Maguire family described their weekend routine, their family interview was characterised by longer hours in bed on Saturday and Sunday, Elaine, aged fifteen states that '*I only get up if I need to*' Elaine refers to watching *'my telly'* in her bedroom, a recent birthday present.

> *[KC] What about a regular Sunday Elaine?*
>
> *[Elaine, age fifteen] I only get up if I need to, because getting up like, during the week I have to get up like half seven and I'm really bad at getting up I mean, so I usually wait until twelve or something to get up.*
>
> *[KC] And would you sleep the whole time or would you read in bed?*
>
> *[Elaine] If I get up, if I wake up like really early like nine, that's not really early but on a weekend it's early, then I would read or watch my telly.*

Mum Harriet responds and gives her thoughts on the weekend routine, adding that for her going to mass on a Sunday morning has been an important practice in the family since the children were babies. Though now she finds it challenging to get them out of bed on Sunday mornings.

Harriet relayed that

> *' No we don't make them, no I've often tried to get them for half past twelve mass and they still can't make that one so, it's an avoidance tactic that the two of them use to stay in bed and pretend to be asleep and then they won't be too lively. It's a known fact that teenagers do need to sleep in, in the morning. Though I tell them there will be no dinner unless they go to mass (laughter)'.*

Bradley aged seventeen gives his thoughts and how he finds it difficult to get up in the morning by answering the following question 'What about you Bradley do you get up at a different time on the weekends?'

> *'I get up later yeah, although it depends what the week before was like do you know, if you were kind of, if you had sleep to catch up on do you know what I mean? I would go to bed early enough during the weekdays anyway, so it's not too bad. Yeah I think it's the dark, the damp mornings, ah to face this and get the bus and everything.'*

Often a set family routine can cause conflict and this requires negotiation on the part of parents and children. For example Harriet's joke in the above extract about not feeding the older children if they don't come to Mass. Possibly this humour covers up the underlying contentious issue in the family as regards attendance at mass that they must all navigate a way through. This highlights the use of humour again similar to the excerpt where Mum Martha Keyes sprays the water and gets son Oisin to sound the trumpet to rouse her daughter Mairead up out of bed at the weekend. Vuchinich et al. (1988) propose that families employ many different ways to address issues and frequently argue and debate about various topics, this can be very valuable in terms of learning negotiating skills for children and adolescents.

## Housework and routine

Housework as a topic was spoken about by seven out of twelve of the families interviewed**.** The mothers in the family spoke more about household tasks than the fathers (although more mothers were interviewed in total). Arguably for many mothers the routines associated with parenting could be considered a form of

'emotional labour' where multiple tasks and obligations are juggled on behalf of the family (Hochschild 1997). Several of the mothers in the research expressed that this was the case, explaining that they were the ones who did most of the organisation of family routine even if they were in full time employment. Amina, Mum to the Arshad family is in full time employment but she explained that she did almost all the housework. Here she describes her typical evening routine after her husband, Nasir comes home at about 6.15pm.

> *[Amina, Mum]– so if Nasir is  back by then we just have a chat and at around 6.15 we go to our friends house where the girls have their Quran lessons and from 6.30 until 7.45pm, this is a really important part of the day. That is the time when I get a chance sit and to talk with other mothers and have a bite to eat. When I'm at home I'm either doing vacuuming – in the 2 hours I have I do vacuuming or I put the clothes in the washing machine, put the dishes in the dishwasher, clean the worktops and generally managing things while I'm talking to them and eating. We have one hour or less depending on how tired they are, we just talk, talk about homework which she has done mostly in the crèche but I just go over it again I never seem to be finished the jobs that need to be done.*

Amina begins by describing that in the evening she takes her daughters to a friend's house for Quran lessons, this religious education is important to her and her husband. It also afforded Amina a chance *'to sit and to talk'* to other women. When she gets home after this she does a series of domestic tasks, often multi-tasking so that she can prepare food or clean and tidy while going over homework with her daughters. She does not mention what her husband is doing at this time. Research indicates that women do most of the domestic labour at home regardless of whether or not they are employed outside the home (Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989; Schober 2013). According to Coltrane (2000) most women feel that childcare and domestic labour is their duty and that they are obliged to carry it out whereas men see it as optional.

During the family interviews several of the children explained that they helped with tasks and expressed that they thought this was helpful to the family. This echoes research carried out by Leonard (2009), whose research indicated that children are conscious of a notion of fairness in supporting their family with daily tasks. Below

are several accounts from families with various family members expressing their views. In the Walsh family, Sharon and her son Jeff aged nine did include a discussion of housework as part of their interview. Sharon was keen to express that she expected Jeff to help out with chores and this was part of how they spent time together.

> [KC] *Do you help your mum with the chores at mealtimes like laying the table or ...?*
>
> [Jeff, age nine] *Yeah. I help with the cooking and other things like hoovering sometimes.*
>
> [Sharon, Mum] *What's your job? What's always your job cooking the dinner? Cutting the ...? It's been his job since he was about two. The carrots (laughter).*
>
> [Jeff]  *And feeding the dogs, and the washing on the line.*
>
> [Sharon] *And feeding the dogs, he feeds his dogs.*
>
> [Sharon] *like he helps me hang out the washing too now, you know, when he helps make up the dinner, he might go in and sit on the couch and watch TV and I'll finish it off and then I'll come in and we'll eat together and we mightn't use the kitchen table ...*
>
> [Jeff]  *Yeah.. we don't use the table it's the couch*
>
> [Sharon] *... because the fire could be on in the sitting room and we both want to be cosy and we just want to be quiet and enjoy our sit down together ...*

In this excerpt Sharon prompts Jeff to convey what his tasks are in the family. Although at the outset of the segment the responses are about the detail of the tasks, by around the middle of the piece Sharon and Jeff in a joint dialogue finish each other's sentences and the narrative becomes more about the chores they do together to get to the objective of sitting down together and '*be cosy*' (Kohler Riessman 2008). Sharon mentions that Jeff feeds his dogs, pet care was mentioned by six of the families and this was often carried out by the children themselves.

The Hanlon family Ursula and Bill and their four daughters give their views on helping out with household tasks.

> [KC]   And do the girls do chores?
>
> [Sile, age thirteen] Yeah. Yeah. Apart from the lunches.
>
> [Sorcha, age eleven] I help peeling potatoes and I mash the mash and set the table.
>
> [Heidi, age nine] No! I usually set the table!
>
> [Ursula, Mum] Yeah and they help out, no problem to you, you're well able to do it. Empty, fill the dishwasher, everything, they clean their room, they clean the sitting room. And they do tea. Yeah they help, yeah we make tea. Sile makes cakes. Sorcha can do a load of other things, can't you? You help with dinner and things don't you? Sorcha is just great with Ciara the youngest I'd be lost without her.
>
> [Sorcha] I don't mind at all, I like to help.

There is a clear notion of fairness here of everybody pulling together as a unit. Sorcha at age eleven clearly is happy to help out with her little sister and to engage in other domestic chores this is similar to the findings by Leonard (2009). According to Gill (1998) children are socialised through the activity of housework, parents use positive and negative reinforcement to integrate children into doing tasks, also asserting that parents increase the complexity of household jobs as the children get older, we see this in the Hanlon family as Sorcha the oldest seems to have the most responsibility. For example simple tasks like laying the table for a young child and more demanding tasks like cooking a meal for an adolescent.  The Hanlon children have a good role model in their father Bill according to Ursula (the Mum),

> But I have to add like that I think Bill is very different to other husband's, he does all the grocery shopping here and puts on the washes just as much as I do and it's a very equal. And he's really comfy. And he's really comfy.
>
> [Heidi, age nine] He's a lovely cuddly dad.

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*[Ursula] And I think it's really important for the girls to see him as a positive male role model that is able to. For example when we have any school meetings, I do half of them and Bill does the other half and you know it's equal, you know I think that's really important Dad helps too.*

Here Ursula wants to point out that her husband Bill is very much involved in the household activity and in wider family support like taking half of the school meetings. She suggests that this is very important for her daughters to see a man actively engaging with his children's lives. Perhaps this example is at odds with research carried out by Coltrane (2000) who suggests that men see childcare and domestic labour as tasks they are not obliged to do.

The O'Brien family children speak about a familiar theme in discussing that they help their mother Jennifer around mealtimes although the older daughter Jill does more helping than her younger siblings. This little narrative illustrates how two of the siblings tell the story of this family's understanding of helping out with the housework, they have a shared knowledge that they do not have 'given jobs' but help out when it is clear they need to do so.

*[KC] Do you help out at home? Do you have jobs?*

*[Jill, age twelve] Yeah we take turns. We kind of, one of us, we don't really have any given jobs we get everything like mammy just says now set the table will you and she's just like finishing off making the dinner and sometimes we'd help her make the dinner like we'd get out the pasta or put in the salt or mix it for a while she goes to the bathroom or something.*

*[KC]   Okay. (Laughter)*

*[Jill]   So it's just as you go along like just everybody helps generally when there's a need. Well like I can make baked beans and I can make a pizza in the oven and I can make toast, I can make naan bread and I can make scrambled eggs.*

*[Amy, age eight] And I can make rice pudding in the microwave.*

The girls in the O'Brien family explain how they generally help out at home but in particular they help out with food preparation.  Jill has more to say about helping out

at home than younger siblings, arguably this is because she is the oldest. Amy aged eight adds a little quote at the end reinforcing the fact that she too can help with the cooking, Adam, Amy's twin does not feature in this narrative at all even though he was present. Helping out with meals and baking were common themes that emerged when children were asked in the family interviews what kind of task they helped with. The responses from children of separated parents in this research gave the impression that they do more helping at home than the children who live with both parents, although this is a very small sample. Gill (1998) argues that when mothers become more involved in the outside world of paid employment children's participation in household labour increased, so perhaps this may be reason why children helped more because there is only one adult to stretch to all the domestic labour that a home requires. Gill (1998) goes on to say that girl's involvement increased more than boys when mothers are more involved in the outside employment. According to Brannen's (1995) study of helping at home adolescents felt they should be involved with self- care such as looking after one own room, whereas they should be less involved with family care, for example cooking a meal or cleaning communal areas in the home. This is at odds with the responses from families in this study, almost all the children stated that they wished to help out the family. Helping out at home is seldom considered from the children's point of view, more commonly it is from the perspective of the parent (Leonard 2009; O'Brien 1995). The narrative extracts give clear voice to the children's views and contributions to family life in the context of domestic routines

## Conclusion

With reference to the main research question in this study, it is clear from the findings that families spend together in specific ways, much of which they spend together is in the performance of every day routines. Family routines vary with the ages of children and depend on how many outside factors impinge upon the family together with the internal needs and demands of the family members. According to Fiese (2006) families need to balance the practical organisation of the home with meeting the emotional needs of family members. Various family routines may appear mundane or insignificant on the surface but it is not the duration of the activity or the time spent but the repetition of the activity and the meaning that is

shared between the family members that is important (Fiese 2006; Daly 2007). Another research aim was to examine how family identity is understood and maintained by the family members and whether and how the family routines and rituals cement this identity. This chapter illustrates how routines such as putting children to bed or sharing meals together can have a unique emotional intimacy for the family members creating and sustaining close bonds between individuals and thus maintaining a family identity (Gabb 2008; 2009).

A methodological observation concerning my use of the family interview in relation to the above findings reveals that this method allows for layers of meaning to be built up between each family member regarding family routines. Interesting and very relevant insights into the function of family routines can be uncovered using this method. During the family interviews the family members spoke easily and at length about how family routines could simultaneously be restrictive and at the same time create stability and predictability. The adult family members by in large contributed more to this topic but children had opinions on family routines also and added to the accounts of their parents. Family routines are located within the micro structural level of the immediate family but are at the same time directly influenced by the demands of work and school and obligations and even at the macro societal level such as the economy and labour market. The data from the family interviews reflects that family routines can be conceived from a bioecological perspective Bronfenbrenner (1979), where family routines are sustained and influenced by many structural levels which impact on one another in a dynamic process. Family routines also operate to socialise children and give them an opportunity to learn the often unspoken rules and norms in their family in preparation for their future roles in society.

A further proposition of Bronfenbrenner (2001) is that 'the psychological development of parents is powerfully influenced by the behaviour and development of their children'. This claim of Bronfenbrenner's is borne out by the data from the family interviews. Bronfenbrenner goes on to explain the proposition that children are developed by their parent's presence and nurturance and this he says appears to have validity. However, children, with demands of their existence and their busy lives can also contribute to the psychological development of their parents. For example parents with growing families have to accommodate the feeding and

sleeping routines of their children into their routines and later to help regulate school and educational demands and weave this activity into their daily lives. The parents in the family interviews appeared to be very sensitive to their children's views and took them very seriously, for example Isla Golden who parents acceded to her demands to go to school. Other parents, like the Barrett family took a different approach to school opting for flexible routines.

In conclusion it is appropriate to state that, the theme (findings herein) of family routine is inherently linked to an exploration of how families spend time together, which is a key research question in this study. Sharon single parent to her son Jeff aptly sums up the sense of importance in finding special time together in the midst of hectic family and work routines.

> *'Yeah and when you're in work, when you leave, when you get up at seven in the morning and you're gone to work and you're dropping kids to school and you're gone to work and you've done a full day's work and you come home and you've got to do homework and you're going to have to spend two hours with your kids, you don't want to spend it fighting with them, you want to enjoy the time with them. I just make sure I'm home when I'm home'.*

Ensuring that parents are psychologically at home when they are home, brings a natural conclusion to this first exploration, analysis and discussion of family routines

The next chapter will consider family time as spent in ritual activities, the special days that mark a change from the day to day routine.

# Chapter 7 Analysis and discussion of family rituals

## Introduction

> The development of a ritual by a family is an index of the common interest of its members in the family as a group.

> (Bossard and Boll 1949: 468)

This chapter will explore time spent together in celebration and ritual in families. When discussing spending time together the participant families frequently referred to sharing special times, such as holiday occasions and days of personal significance such as the birthdays of family members. All twelve families interviewed highlighted special occasions as significant whether religious or personal in nature. This seemed to evoke a particular quality of time spent together and sense of out of the ordinariness as distinct from the mundane everyday time (Daly 2007). The children within this study had a great deal to contribute about family time spent in ritual and celebration, this was a topic that seemed to spark great interest and evoke many personal memories and stories. Ritual occasions have a particular quality for families that was easily described by all the interviewees. Ritual is generally considered within academic literature to be,

> A symbolic form of communication that owing to the satisfaction that family members experience through its repetition is acted out in a systematic fashion over time.

> (Wolin and Bennett 1984: 401)

## Ritual and the narrative approach

According to Bruner (1987) stories provide a coherent thread of understanding of experiences from the past into the present and onwards to the future, in this chapter the families tell their stories about family tradition and ritual. Bruner (1987:15) elaborates by saying, 'narratives actually structure perceptual experience, organize memory and segment and purpose-build the very events of a life'. In this chapter mothers fathers and children all contribute to the understanding of shared

experiences of family ritual and traditions through their stories. Their narratives are frequently constructed together, negotiating the content of what is said. Bruner (1987) suggests that we become the stories we tell about ourselves but in order for the stories to be coherent they must connect with the norms and values of wider society. This is somewhat similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model of development, insofar as we and our stories we tell are all nested within in our family, our community, our society and our particular historical time.

## Routine and Rituals

Routines are family practices that structure the days and weeks of family life whereas rituals contain greater symbolic significance for the family (Keltner et al. 1990; Viere 2001; Fiese 2006). Family rituals are frequently imbued with an emotional or nostalgic element. The families who were interviewed spoke about various occasions that they considered special times for their family. This chapter looks at rituals a key times in the year such as Christmas,

## Christmas and family ritual

Each of the twelve families spoke about the celebration of Christmas when referring to time spent together, even though two of the families were not Christian and two of the families described themselves as having no religion. In the quote below Elaine, of the Maguire family who is age fifteen refers to her favourite family time.

> ' I don't know it's like everything, I like the sense of family like, everybody is here on Christmas Day and you know and everybody helps doing the, cooking the dinner and stuff and then there's presents as well'

The preparation for Christmas seemed to be almost as important as the actual event itself and this shared activity seemed to provide a basis for memories of time spent together. In the following excerpts two of the families described the ritual of putting up the Christmas tree, the Giles family and the Lawlor family.

### Portrait of the Giles family

The Giles family consists of Margaret and J.P. who have been married for ten years, they have two daughters, Kirstie aged nine and Lily aged six. J. P owns his own business which demands that he works long hours. Margaret works part time in the

mornings in a local playschool. The family live in an urban setting and have recently moved from their old house to a new much larger home. Below they describe putting up their Christmas tree. In response to my question 'What do you think is the most special thing about Christmas?' Kirstie the oldest child responds first, though she is quickly joined in the dialogue by her parents. Each narrator adds to the account as they tell the story,

> *[Kirstie age nine] we love decorating the tree, me and Lily we love putting all the decorations on the tree.*

> *[Margaret, Mum]  And what happened to the tree last year Kirstie? Was it last year? I think so. It toppled over and it nearly fell! (Laughter).*

> *[Kirstie] Yes! It wobbled like it was going to fall! I kept telling Lily you are putting too many decorations on one side! I had to hold the tree up and shout for Dad!*

> *[KC] Oh!*

> *[JP, Dad]  No wait that wasn't last – oh no it wasn't last year it was the year before was it? Yeah. I was sick and the tree was kind of sideways and then it fell over – because the bottom of the tree was completely crooked! – then we got Tony the neighbour in to cut the slanty bit off – and then at least the tree stood up straight! (Laughter).*

> *[Margaret] Actually in the end it was a great tree, really bushy and the best tree we have ever had wasn't it Lily?*

> *[Lily] Yeah that was a lovely tree in the end.*

This excerpt illustrates that the family negotiate the story of the tree between them. Dad J.P., Mum Margaret and daughter Kirstie age nine all add their memories to the story of the troublesome Christmas tree. For instance Kirstie aged nine thought that the reason the tree almost fell was because her sister put too many decorations on one side whereas, her Dad J.P. said he that he recalled that it was because he cut the base of the tree crooked in the first place. Kirstie initially starts with the comment that her favourite part of Christmas is decorating the tree, then her Mum Margaret interjects with a specific memory, (the wobbly tree) that she prompts Kirstie to recall

and explain. Frequently throughout the interviews with parents and children this supportive scaffolding of children's' narrative occurs (Vygotsky 1978). Margaret and J.P support their daughters to bring their accounts to life by giving them space to speak and prompting them throughout the narrative, this in turn creates a co-construction between them all where their joint understanding of the topic is revealed (Kohler Riessman 1993a, 2008).

Some perspectives on narrative research debate whether stories like this above represent an individual disposition or are instead constructed by external social circumstances impacting upon an individual (Andrews et. al 2008). The excerpt regarding Christmas points to a more co-constructed narrative that develops in the talk between people. The narrative can be understood as form of exchange that is dialogically constructed (Bakhtin 1981). These unique and personal stories get woven together, with layers of information added by each person speaking, all contributing their part to the dialogue (Georgakopoulou 2000; Bamberg and Andrews 2004). Similar to the Giles family in the above extract the Lawlor family in the excerpt below conveyed a similar tradition and subsequent rituals in their home at Christmas.

### Portrait of the Lawlor family

The Lawlor family comprises of Mum Mandy and her twin daughters Ali and Grace who are five years old. Mandy is an artist and a fulltime Mum to the girls. Mandy is separated from the father of the girls since the girls were very young, however Ali and Grace see their father frequently. Mandy moved from the city to the country when the girls were born to be near her mother and sisters whose support she greatly relies upon.

In response to my question 'What do you think is the most special thing about Christmas?' Mum Mandy responds and her daughters Ali and Grace aged five years augment what she has said with their comments to enrich the account.

> *[Mandy, Mum] For us it is decorating the Christmas tree, you see we have to wait, what we do is we wait for the girls' birthday to go by first then on the 3rd of December when the birthday is over we put up our tree and we put up loads of lights and we have – we have a fairy on top.*

*[Ali, age five] Oh a lovely fairy and we have a fairy and we made our own decorations to go on the tree…and we have big socks with our names on it and Santa puts nice things, he puts little bits and bobs in there.*

*[Grace, age five] Yes we can't wait, we are happy that Christmas is finally coming!*

*[Ali] But no Christmas tree until after our birthday.*

Mum Mandy explains that the girls' birthday is in early December so the family wait until that date has passed before officially starting the Christmas preparation, she emphasised that she wanted to make the birthday special and memorable and separate from Christmas and this has become a tradition in their family ever since the girls were born.

## Christmas Morning

Christmas morning seemed to evoke particularly strong memories for the children in the families.

Here the Giles family again describe a Christmas morning. In response to my question 'Can you tell me something about Christmas? Lily Giles aged six years and her sister Kirstie age nine years tell the following story together.

*[Lily, age six] I go downstairs ...... into my sitting room– and then the last time when I went there I went down and then there was a huge rocking horse and it was mine.*

*[Kirtsie, age nine] Oh I know! I remember one Christmas ...One night when dad was watching the television really late on Christmas Eve night, in the morning I ran downstairs to the sitting room and guess what? There were no presents! I went into every single room and the living – the room beside the kitchen had the presents on the table.*

*[Lily] It was because Dad was in the sitting room so late that Santa had to put them into the dining room! He just had to leave them there so Dad would not see him! He couldn't leave them under the tree in the sitting room!*

*[Kirstie] And that was I'd say three or four years ago. I remember I got a pink house from Santa where I could put my dolls; it was called 'Happyland'.*

This little conversation by the two sisters follows a classic narrative sequence (Kohler Riessman 1993a, 2008) where there is a story that is laid out and builds to a highpoint, in this case where Santa cannot leave the presents in the usual place due to the 'Dad' in the family sitting room watching television. Labov's (1972, 1982) framework is useful here to unpack  how this piece of dialogue is constructed, Labov suggests that all narratives contain a common set of elements, first the speaker orientates the listener, then the complicating action is described, next the action is evaluated and finally the action is resolved.  Lily in her first line orientates us to the situation, it is Christmas at her home i.e. 'I go downstairs into my sitting room'. The next speaker Kirstie then introduces the story that Dad was present in the sitting room late on Christmas Eve, this fact is key to what both girls remember about the story. In the next sentence, Lily reinforces what Kirstie has just said about 'Dad' occupying the space where Santa was attempting to leave the presents. The story is finally resolved by Lily age six who describes how the story ended happily with the gifts being left not in the ritual place by the tree in the living room but instead in the dining room. This back and forth of the conversation builds up a picture of what the girls jointly remembered about the occasion, although each had slightly different recollections of the event.

## Ritual and culture

Three of the families had parents who were not born and raised in Ireland and although the families still celebrated Christmas their beliefs and traditions regarding the celebration of Christmas differed from some of the other families interviewed. These times of celebration may have a function in socialising the children into the tradition of their families, and to reiterate the idea that according that 'routines and rituals are important purveyors of culture and regulators of development' (Fiese et al 2001:387). Furthermore, these three families expressed that they very much enjoyed spending time together over the holiday season, in addition they expressed that change away from normal work and school routines was as much a part of the holiday feeling as the celebration itself. In the next excerpt the Golden family describe what Christmas means to them.

***Portrait of the Golden family***

The Golden family are Annika and Brendan who have been married for seven years and their daughters are Isla, aged six and Milly aged two and a half. Annika's Swedish mother and stepfather live with the couple, Annika is a Swedish national. The family live over three floors of a large detached home in an urban area. Annika is a full time mother and Brendan has recently become unemployed and is studying part time. Annika in response to my question 'How do you celebrate special times together?' answered with the following analysis;

> *[Annika, Mum] well.. Christmas is a very important time of the year for us as a family. But there are some differences ...we celebrate on the 24th, Mum and I make the special gingerbread biscuits and we don't have the same kind of tradition with the bearded man... pause... I mean my mother never told me stories like that......*

> *....so I felt you know, I think for me there's probably something that I'm maybe struggling with a little bit because it's so very real here where since we feel it isn't very real, you figure out very quickly as a child that actually this is only 'made up' and that realisation that it did not take away from the magic of Christmas at all. We have had this conversation many times myself and Brendan (husband) I don't feel entirely comfortable kind of spinning this whole story, you know, he's not coming because anyone is good anyway he's just coming because that's what he does. I mean this is new to me so I don't know how I would react if the children turned to me one day and said why did you lie to me?*

And as a follow up to her remarks, Annika goes on to explain that she goes along with this Santa Claus tradition for the sake of her daughter,

> *Do you know, I can't tell Isla the truth because if she was to tell everyone in school she would be the most hated girl in school?*

Arguably this comment illustrates a clash of cultural values and traditions between Swedish society and Irish society. Annika wants to share her beliefs with her daughter but is conflicted as she does not want her daughter to be '*hated*' in school because she may communicate unpalatable information to her classmates. This

narrative belongs to Annika who is speaking about her views of Christmas in Ireland. It has a very personal reflective quality and is quite different from some of the co-constructed pieces in this chapter. On reflection it is quite clear that Annika's narrative does follow the orientation, complicating action, evaluation and resolution set out by Labov (1972: 1982). Annika orientates the listener with the statement the Christmas is important to them as a family, the complicating action is that Christmas is different in Sweden, even the date of the celebration. Annika's evaluation is that the differences in tradition can cause difficulties especially if she is honest about Santa Claus and her worry that her daughter may tell other children the truth. However there is no real resolution to this account we are left with the unfinished business of Annika in a dilemma of whether to lie to her daughter or not. There is a palpable feeling from her words that Annika is influenced by the traditions handed down by her mother especially when she says *'my mother never told me stories like that'*, referring to the story of Santa Claus in popular in Ireland. Family belonging and solidarity can be reinforced with the enactment of particular ritual activities such as making the gingerbread biscuits for Annika and her mother (Cheal 1988; Bennett et al. 1998). Although only Annika gives the account it has the imagined presence of her daughter Isla who is totally pertinent to the narrative. So the narrative starts out as a narrative about Christmas but it becomes a story with a deeper ethical dimension.

Similar to the Golden family introduced above the Arshad family who live in Ireland come from a different background and tradition regarding the celebration of special days.

The Arshad family consists of Mum Amina, Dad Nasir and two daughters Farah aged six and Razia, aged four. Both Amina and Nasir are Muslims who are very keen to pass on their religious and cultural traditions to their daughters. In response to my question *'Are there special times that your family celebrates all together?* Farah aged five explains about how the family celebrate the festival of Eid.

> *[Farah age five]  Like we don't have Christmas because we just think that people like – we know that mammy's and daddies are just giving the presents. Yeah that's why we do Eid instead like our mommy's and dads give us the presents.*

*[KC] Do you do anything else on Eid?*

*[Farah] ehm….*

*[Amina, Mum] What do we do to the hands?*

*[Farah] Well we have to put some designs on our hands…*

*[Farah] And when we're going to sleep we have to put our hands out it is in case… you would put them on your face or something accidentally*

*[Amina] I just put the cling film on them so …*

*[Farah] The last Eid we went to somebody's house and they did it, it is like a kind of a party.*

*[Amina, Mum] Yeah we all gathered together and all the kids – yeah……. and so that's the getting ready for Eid.*

*[KC] is there anything special that you do as a family on the day of Eid?*

*[Amina]  When you were wearing the black dress you went to the Mosque with daddy.*

*[Farah] And the last Eid we went to somewhere and there was kind of a clown he was giving out balloons. That was in the evening, yeah.*

*[Razia, age four] At the party I got a special camera and wore my new shalwar kameeze.*

*[Amina] And then there was a party in the evening and we have a lovely time together it was the first Eid that Razia (age four) could really enjoy as she was old enough to join in the preparations*

In this little piece of narrative Farah aged five used the tradition of Christmas practices in Ireland as a reference point to explain to me (the interviewer) the difference between the gift giving traditions at Christmas as opposed to giving traditions of Eid. This insight illustrates that she has the capacity to put herself in my shoes in order to help me understand a comparable tradition in what she perceives as my cultural background. This seems remarkable for a five year old child to show

such sophistication of thought and understanding and conveys a high level of personal agency as an interviewee (James and James 2004; Corsaro 2005). As the interviewer I manage to prompt Farah into explaining more about the tradition of Eid. Although the content of the narrative is interesting, the structure of how Farah chooses to tell it is equally interesting (Kohler Riessman 1993a; 2008). Farah orientates us with the fact that in her family she '*does not have Christmas'*, even though I asked her about spending special times together Farah chooses to start with this clarification so that I am orientated to her next sentence about the festival of Eid. Her complicating action is that there are no Christmas presents. After my next question she pauses a little so her Mum Amina scaffolds her by asking her a specific question. Farah begins the next sentence by orientating me again to the process of painting the hands with Henna for Eid and the precautions she has to take to avoid smudging the designs.

Mum Amina adds to the narrative in the next sentence, but Farah interrupts with a change in the direction of her story, she introduces the party. As the sequence progresses Mum Amina again prompts and scaffolds the dialogue for Farah (Vygotsky 1978), Amina encourages Farah to explain about going to the mosque at Eid, however Farah ignores this prompt and continues to elaborate and evaluate the details of the party at Eid in her next sentence. Farah is only stopped when her younger sister Razia interrupts with her own description of the party. Amina provides the resolution in the account explaining that the preparations for Eid are as important as the day itself. This co-constructed account highlights that each of the three narrators had their own agendas and goals for the story but the group story is more complex than any single voice and points to the relationships within the family as well as the topic.

## Separated parents and family ritual

Four of the families interviewed were households headed by one parent. In three of the families the couples were previously married and are now separated but not divorced. In each of these families the mother had most access to the children although in every family the children's father was in regular contact with his children. One family, the Walsh family is headed by Sharon who was never married to her son's father. Philip, Jeff's father sees his son frequently.

In these separated families, a distinct sense of a desire to invest in ritual occasions like Christmas and Birthdays was evident from the transcripts. Several of the parents expressed that they wished to keep a sense of continuity and stability for their families no matter what obstacles needed to be overcome. Rituals help provide special times of cohesion and togetherness in separated families (Olson and Haynes 1993). Clear communication between the parents was highlighted by all of the separated families as one of the key factors in ensuring that the children were content and their wishes were fulfilled at special occasions. According to Steinglass et al. (1987) familial stress may be first identified in the disruption of family rituals and routines. This stress may be due to separation or economic difficulties. There may be greater satisfaction and sense of well-being if these rituals can be maintained in the aftermath of family breakdown or disruption (Steinglass et al. 1987; Fiese at al. 2002). In the next narrative one separated family; the Lawlors talk about their Christmas ritual.

In an earlier excerpt in this section this family explained the tradition of putting up the Christmas tree together after the girls' December Birthday. Here, their Mum Mandy explains that there is another important aspect to Christmas, organising time to be spent with their Dad who is not part of their household.

In response to my question' can you tell me about your Christmas day?' Mandy responds with this piece of narrative.

> *[Mandy]  And what else do we do?*
>
> *[Ali, age five] Santa comes first thing in the morning…and...*
>
> *[Mandy] and then we go to mass; we go to mass with Auntie Annette and all my family. And we always go over to Nana's at Christmas. And then they go down to their daddy as well. Their daddy comes out to see Santa coming and then they go down to their daddy's for the afternoon and then back to my family in the evening, it is all go… the girls are exhausted going between the various homes, but exhausted and happy … and we have to think of everyone.*
>
> *[Ali]  He leaves the presents under the tree and we leave a drink of milk for him and carrots for Rudolph.*

Interestingly in the way that this piece of narrative is structured we can see how Mandy the Mum is prompting her daughters to tell the story of the how the day unfolds by answering my question with a question. Ali age five answers but before she is finished Mandy interrupts her with a complicating action, that of how it is challenging to organise for everyone to be together. Seemingly there are two stories here that are being told, the surface story of the habits and traditions of Christmas morning and the 'other' story of the difficulties that can become apparent when trying to bring everyone together for a special occasion. Ali continues with her story of Santa which she began at the start of the sequence. It is clear from Mandy's response that a lot of thought has gone into the arrangements in order '*to keep everyone happy*'. Christmas day has such significance for each family member that each person is invested in making it feels special even if it requires complicated measures on the day. Making sure that both parents have time with their children seems to be paramount in each of the separated families' accounts of special days.

In the next excerpt Sharon, head of the Walsh family, shares her particular story of Christmas as a single parent of one son, Jeff aged nine. Jeff's Dad Philip is still very involved with his son. Sharon contextualises her narrative at the outset by referring to the past to a time when she and her partner still lived together with their son and how the situation has changed, and her aspirations for making Christmas special for Jeff.

> *[KC] 'Can you tell me about your Christmas day?'*

> *[Sharon] I just felt that way, you know, I wanted him (her son Jeff) to have that special feeling at Christmas that we had in the past when Phil and I were still together………. you know, we used to make a big deal about the Santa's letter be written and be put in the fire and then magic would take it and we'd come down the next day and it was gone and we'd decorate the house……*

> *…….It's like a grotto at Christmas, it's my favourite time of the year and we'd get the tree together and decorate it together and we would have hot chocolate and marshmallows, we're total, you know, talk about a Christmas postcard like it's very, because there's only two of us, you know, and Christmas Day would be, you know, that's very much a ritual from the point of view that he'd stay with me on Christmas night, when he was very young*

*his dad would come over first thing Christmas morning, ………even if it was at four in the morning when he woke up for Santa after we'd split up so he'd have the two of us there every Christmas morning he always had mum and dad there, he has his Christmas morning, he has his breakfast with his dad, that's a big deal …*

*…….Phil would stay with us until maybe nine o'clock in the morning and then they would go to mass with his dad's family then go back to his dad's family's house and they would have, open Christmas presents that he has there.*

In this piece Sharon paints a picture about her and her son's distinctive rituals about her family's Christmas. The Santa letter up the chimney and decorating the tree together, she used descriptive language to portray a particular quality of time spent together. Sharon in her extended narrative explains that the simple ritual preparations for Christmas shared between her and her son are the most important aspects of their time together. However, as in many of the narratives there are two stories being told simultaneously. Ostensibly, the story is about the time preparing for and celebrating Christmas which Sharon does in vivid detail but there is a turning point when a more nuanced but significant story takes over. About midway through the story Sharon explains quite passionately about how hard she and her ex-partner Phil work to make sure that Jeff sees both of his parents and extended families on Christmas day. The story is evaluated by Sharon saying that Jeff eats his breakfast with his Dad and that is a big deal in her opinion. There is a keen sense from Sharon that she wishes for Jeff to feel that he belongs to both sides of his family even if she and Phil don't live together anymore. This belongingness can be reinforced by the symbolic activities that Sharon outlines, such as the eating breakfast together on Christmas morning which has become an important ritual for Sharon, Jeff and Phil even though they don't live together anymore (Bennett et al. 1988; Cheal 1988).

Sharon begins another narrative about activities for later in the day and explains here how they manage the logistics of Jeff spending time with each of his parents between each family home. This involves sharing in two Christmas dinners.

*[KC] How do you organise your day?*

*[Sharon] At his Dads they have a tradition and they go to the grave on Christmas day, his grandad died before he was born so he goes to the grave on Christmas Day to see Barry, that's his grandad.*

*[KC] Sounds very busy*

*[Sharon] Yeah but it works, it really works, it's not a problem, there's not like there's no rushing because it starts so early and then breakfast and then he's gone to mass and then he has dinner and then he doesn't go back to his dad until about half six and then they have dinner and when dinner is over they might play some games and we might come home at about nine so he's plenty of time in each area I mean I get him, I get to spend the Christmas Day with him and his dad gets to have it too and he gets to have it with both parents. So we're very lucky like that and he's never lost out, you know.*

Sharon's story of Christmas is quite poignant as it conveys a story of the preciousness of time spent together, a special effort made to define time together. Traditions like going to the grandad's grave are incorporated into the celebration of what is essentially a family occasion. Sharon describes how she feels their son has not lost out on special family occasions because she and her ex- partner have worked hard to create a sense of family stability in both sets of families (Olson and Haynes 1993). The final resolution in the story comes with the words '*he's never lost out you know*' From Sharon's lengthy narrative we can sense some of the dilemmas she faces as she tries to reconcile the breakdown of her relationship and how it has impacted on their family. Sharon's words seem to describe a situation where Jeff is almost a commodity, precious to both her and Phil who needs to be shared equally to achieve the greatest harmony. This highlights the conflicts and struggles that effect many families in Ireland today especially at time of special significance such as Christmas.

## Evolving family traditions

When asked about how they spend their time together, five of the families would refer back to activities that had started a few years previously and slowly evolved into a family tradition. This theme of family traditions was broadly evident in two

dimensions (a) a tradition or practice that was influenced by previous generations or wider family and (b) traditions or practices that have been started in this current family unit and are gaining the status of a 'tradition' over the last couple of years (Bossard and Boll 1949, 1950; Fiese et al.2001).

For example the Giles family explained that wherever they go on holiday they bring back a decoration for their Christmas tree. Margaret, the mother of the Giles family explains how the tradition started.

> *[Margaret, Mum] We started it when we were on honeymoon in Disneyland I said I'd get something for our first Christmas – you know they had Christmas decorations ... and I couldn't resist them even though they were quite expensive.*
>
> *[Lily, age six] We have got Minnie Mouse – and Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.*
>
> *[J, P. Dad] And why didn't we get Goofy? Goofy wasn't one of our favourites at the time. (Laughter) We're into Goofy – now well at least Lily is!*
>
> *[Kirstie, age nine]... It's like you actually like you've a happy memory of our holidays each time when you take them out.*
>
> *[Margaret] Yeah. And of course when the tree capsized all the (Laughter) ... we were like 'oh not the ones from America' (laughter).*
>
> *[Lily] ... and they didn't even break.*
>
> *[J.P] the ones I got in Germany were wooden little ones weren't they Lily? Oh Lord! But they broke. More Baubles broke, didn't they? It was the glassy baubley ones, that broke wasn't it Kirstie?*
>
> *[Kirstie] I broke one as well. I loved that one*
>
> *[J.P.] Yeah you broke that one; you broke Donald's head off.*
>
> *[Margaret] Poor Donald, (laughter)*

This tradition was subsequently explained by the whole family, each person having a shared understanding of what this particular practice means to them as a group. It is a tradition that has evolved in their family beginning with Margaret and J.P's honeymoon. It provides an element of shared identity that is unique to their family unit rather than a tradition passed on from previous generations in either J.P.'s or Margaret's family of origin. This celebration of a particular ritual, however small the scale, gives the family group identity' (Wolin and Bennett 1984). This is illustrated by how each of the four family members understood the tradition, they were aware of the story behind the origin of each decoration (Steinglass 1987).

Mum Margaret orientates us at the start of the story by casting back in time to contextualise the account that follows. Lily adds her piece to the narrative by introducing two of her favourite baubles Minnie Mouse and Donald Duck, next J. P. and Kirstie follow on with their comments on the topic of conversation. Margaret then adds the complicating action of the time when the tree collapsed, which is also a turning point in the story, the other family members follows Mum's lead and add their comments on the aftermath of the tree collapse and the range of decorations that were broken. This story is a good example of co-construction of narrative where the whole meaning of what is being told emerges out of joint storytelling (Kohler Riessman 1993a, 2005). This joint storytelling is pertinent to the Barrett family in relation to a generated tradition within their family.

The Barrett family Agnes and Joseph and live with their two daughters Erica aged seven and Rebecca aged four. In contrast to the 'new' family tradition of the Christmas decorations  that has evolved in the Giles family, in the next excerpt the Barrett family explain that they have kept traditions from their parents and adapted them in their current family, building on and developing from the past generations. In response to my question 'are there some traditions that you have kept with your children or are have you developed new ways to celebrate together?' Agnes Barrett, the Mum in the Barrett family describes how some of their family traditions around festivities like Christmas remained much the same as in her childhood whereas others have moved on and been adapted as unique to their current family unit.

> *[Agnes, Mum]….   I think Christmas would still be very much like our Christmas at my own home in the Midlands, we have a farm and a large*

*extended family. We used to open the presents on Christmas morning then have the traditional turkey and ham dinner then callers would come so….. in that way our Christmas now would be pretty much the same, except I don't eat the turkey and ham because I'm a vegetarian. Santa in Joseph's house well….. Santa always left the presents under the tree at his childhood home, but when Santa came to my house we didn't usually have a Christmas tree so he would put them under the bed.*

*But I think we asked Santa here then to leave them under the tree so that was a tradition Joseph really wanted to keep from his family.*

*[Joseph] Yes I still have the image in my head of a perfect Christmas morning with all the toys under the tree so I wanted our girls to experience that.*

*[Agnes]……. But otherwise the rest would be pretty much the same, we would have had similar traditions, we have a family dinner and friends stay around the house and maybe go for a walk if it's a nice day and that.*

*[Joseph, Dad] So it's kind of not really possible then to go and see Agnes's family on Christmas Day it's too far.*

*[Agnes] For the girls and all in the car, we did it once and we found it was too much. It took from our time together on Christmas Day. So Josephs mum usually comes into us, so that's usually what's happened. The last few Christmas' my parents are going to come to see us this year, rather than us going over.*

*[Joseph] We are very happy just to be at home with the girls, it is all we want.*

This account illustrates how Agnes and Joseph have drawn on aspects from their birth families to celebrate Christmas (Rosenthal and Marshall 1988). Agnes starts her story with the idea that Christmas for their family is quite traditional, contextualising her account by giving summaries of her and husband's childhood traditions. Midway through her narrative Joseph joins in with a complicating action stating that it disrupts their day if they travel to see extended family. Agnes then builds on her

husband's comments by stating that travelling affects the quality of their time together. Joseph resolves the account by stating that the most important aspect for them on Christmas day is to be with their daughters for the maximum time. Family rituals inevitably imply that family members are together and this seems to be an important aspect for the Barretts (Meske et al. 1994). Agnes and Joseph co-construct this story and it is doubtful if it would have had the same richness and complexity if just one of them had responded to my question. The full meaning of the story arises out of the joint action and storytelling (Bruner 1986). This shared meaning making through multiple voices is also evident in the narrative from the Maguire family below.

The Maguire family are Mum, Harriet, Dad, James and four children, two adults, Shane age twenty and Sarah age twenty three and two teenagers, Bradley age seventeen and Elaine age fifteen. In the excerpt below Harriet, the Mum, and her two teenage children outline what is important in their home at Christmas.

> *[KC] is there anything you think you do now with the family, your family here that you used to do as a child yourself, that's a kind of tradition that your own parents passed on or did you make a conscious decision to do something different?*
>
> *[Harriet, Mum] Well we would always have a real tree..... and I certainly grew up always having a real tree and that's important to me. I think the smell of the tree and the decorating of the tree is always been a kind of a tradition in our family.... and Elaine, our youngest child would always love to be involved. We usually do it around the first weekend in December...... I think it was you Bradley who used to get the privilege of putting the little angel on the top of the tree?*
>
> *[Bradley, age seventeen] Yeah. I always loved that bit, the glittery angel.*
>
> *[Elaine, age fifteen] it's a little fairy.*
>
> *[Harriet] It used to be an angel, now we've changed it to a star, we've got a bit more grown up, and we had a sort of a toilet roll angel for a long time (laughter).*

> *[Elaine] Lovingly made by me!*

> *[Harriet]  Well I don't know who made it… but probably some poor child in China, which is dreadful…. so now we have a more grown up star that we put on the tree. It was always a case of we would decorate the tree and that was kind of family tradition in that you were just lobbing things on it and we would fight about who did what… it could look a mess…(laughter)*

> *[Elaine]  I was one who got to turn on the little lights on the tree when it was finished, although sometimes they didn't work and we had to run out and buy more (laughter).*

Harriet, the Mum begins the narrative and in common with many of the family stories she begins by casting back in time to her own childhood in order to set the stage for what is to come. '*I certainly grew up always having a real tree'*. We get the sense from the way she presents her first sentence that this is a practice she feels is still relevant for her children. The time frame for the preparations is organised around another important family celebration, son Bradley's December birthday. Harriet speaks of her youngest son and daughter in the opening segment then they respond very much in tune with what Harriet has said. In the next two lines Bradley and Elaine clarify what the decoration is on top of the tree, a fairy or an angel? Elaine adds that she made the decoration but Harriet contradicts by saying no it was possibly made by cheap labour somewhere, a fact which she expresses that she feels some regret over. This negotiation of meaning continues into the next couple of lines as Harriet discusses whose job it was to decorate the tree. Arguably, we are able to hear a lot more rich detail in this joint account of a family tradition than if it were spoken by one narrator. There are multiple opportunities for clarification of points made adding to the depth of the story.

This story is somewhat nostalgic for the family as the two youngest children are now teenagers. The three narrators, Harriet and her children Bradley and Elaine, are joining together to recall what they did as a family at Christmas earlier in their life course. They all still remember vividly the ritual of decorating the tree and preparing for Christmas. This seems to be a strong indicator of shared family identity, (Cheal 1988) and when  adolescents and their parents have similar emotional connections to family rituals  adolescents have a  stronger sense of self and experience less anxiety

in their lives (Fiese 1992). Staying connected to family is very important in adolescence especially as this is also a time of growing independence and autonomy from the family. Research by Crouter et al. (2004) suggests that shared family time contributes to greater adolescent well-being. This narrative also highlights the embedded nature of connection as we develop across the lifespan; it reiterates the ecological framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

## Preparation for ritual

The Keyes family, Mum Martha, Dad, Donal and their three children Mairead, aged twelve years, Oisin aged nine years and Aoife aged five years. In response to my question 'do you have any special traditions in your family?' Mairead, the eldest of the Keyes children describes the tradition of the advent calendar in their home.

> *[Mairead, age twelve] Yeah we have a wooden calendar under there and it has little wooden doors on it.*

> *[KC] Oh I saw it when I came in the door.*

> *[Mairead] On the first day of Advent, what we do is we open our Advent calendar, out in the porch and we open one window of it every day and it has a note in it, and sometimes the note says there are chocolates and all and there's a box of chocolates in it, like a pack of chocolates and stuff……. and like there's a note like we will go and get the Christmas tree today and there's no fighting.*

> *[Aoife age five] No fighting! yeah.*

> *[Oisin, age nine] Yeah no fighting Aoife ….. and it tells us to do something every single day and it's either be kind to someone or do something really nice or get a tree and write your letters for Christmas.*

> *[Aoife, aged five] and there's chocolate in it, I still remember eating the chocolate last year. That was on Christmas Day that chocolate (laughter)*

> *[Oisin] No! You ate almost all the chocolate out of the calendar even before we got to Christmas week! (laughter).*

*[Aoife] The messages tell us to be really good and make a picture of Santa. Oh yeah we have to do that tonight, we have to make a picture for Santa now today yeah.*

*[Oisin] Where did we get the calendar Mam?*

*[Martha, Mum] I can't remember now where I got the calendar from, it is years old, I know we had one at home Mam and Dad did the notes and I always loved it.  I put the notes in now you see and get I also help from this book I have from the angels, so they tell me what to put into it.*

The advent calendar was a special tradition for the Keyes family. The three children eagerly explained its purpose and what it meant to them. This excerpt illustrates a conversational circle between Mum Martha and her three children about the tradition in their family. Mairead the eldest child begins the story, she focuses on the factual elements, that it is a calendar with doors. In her next lines she describes the purpose of the calendar, that there are little notes left by someone giving guidance to the children in the days before Christmas. Martha describes how her parents had a similar calendar when she was a child and how it stayed in her memory Rosenthal and Marshall (1988) stress that family ritual can be passed generationally transmitted form parent or grandparent to child. Aoife age five is listening intently and quickly joins in to reinforce a key aspect of what Mairead has said *'no fighting, yeah'*. This seems to be an important point as Oisin age nine reinforces Aoife's comment further *'Yeah no fighting Aoife!'* We can glimpse here that Aoife may be very conscious that the note about fighting may have been aimed at her. Aoife now changes the subject by introducing the fact that the calendar also contains chocolate, she herself laughs at this, drawing the story away from the subject of fighting. Oisin in the next line (and for the second time) remarks on Aoife's behaviour expressing that Aoife ate most of the chocolate last year. Aoife again comes back with a change of topic to divert the narrative although still with an echo of what has been said before restating that '*the messages tell us to be really good'*. Aoife also brings us back to the present and reorients us saying that the calendar has told them to make a picture of Santa today. Oisin adds a question for Martha his Mum about the origin of the Calendar and Martha responds which ends the story.

This little story is a clear example of a process whereby stories are woven together and built up with layers of talk from different individuals in a group. It also highlights how identities are negotiated within a common space of meaning, each of the children understood the purpose of the calendar and their positions within the family were reinforced by how each child added to the narrative (Kohler Riessman 1993a; 2008; Phoenix 2008; Salmon and Kohler Riessman 2008). Although Mairead the oldest child begins the story, it is Aoife the youngest who really manages the direction of the narrative, despite her brother Oisin's remarks. Aoife, with humour, changes the topic and guides the listener away from choppy waters where her past behaviour is under scrutiny. This highlights the interrelationship between the siblings and the high degree of agency and confidence that Aoife possesses at age five years (James and James 2004).

## Religion and family tradition

The discussion of Christmas can be contextualised within the research timeframe however there are other significant religious traditions that require exploration. Religious occasions are connected very closely with family rituals. Several of the families interviewed described religious celebrations that were shared together and this religious aspect ties in with ritual and symbolism, a key tenet of ritualising (Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Meske et al 1984). These rituals include life course rituals such as christenings, confirmations, weddings and funerals, and also to weekly religious observance which was important to several of the families interviewed including the Maguire family.

> *[KC] Do you have any particular family traditions for special occasions like Christmas?*
>
> *[Harriet, Mum] Oh yeah we do always yeah, we would always, they will always be going to Christmas mass with us and Sarah and Shane will have to, they won't get their presents unless they come to Christmas mass, so we will probably go to the evening one, the Christmas Eve one, the one we usually go to.*

*[Elaine aged fifteen] yeah, but it means because the church is so small we will probably have to go nearly an hour early! Awful! ... (laughter)...It's freezing in there sometimes with the dodgy radiators!*

*[Harriet] To make sure that you even get a seat in it, but it can be very festive and very nice and it's, there's always a little choir and it always is festive and nice isn't it?*

*[Elaine] Ah yeah, it is really sweet with all the candles in the church I shouldn't complain and it's important to Mum.*

*[Harriet] Oh it is yeah. ……. Yeah, yeah it's a given I will be cranky if they complain about going to Christmas mass.*

This exchange between Harriet and her daughter Elaine describes a special tradition at Christmas. Harriet at the outset affirms that they as a family will attend mass at Christmas, in the first line she says '*always*' twice when referring to this practice. In the next sentence she reinforces what she has just said by saying if there are objections to going to mass from the children there will be no presents. This was said light-heartedly but Harriet's words still come across strongly, there is a definite subtext. Elaine responds and acknowledges what Harriet has said although she has two complaints about going to mass; about the cold in the church and how they will have to get there early to get a seat. Harriet responds that it is 'festive and nice' in the church at Christmas which is a softening of her original tone at the start of the narrative. Elaine answers with a conciliatory statement, agreeing that the service is nice and giving credence to her Mum's wishes. Harriet ends by restating more strongly that there will be consequences if her wishes are not respected. This exchange between mother and daughter is rather like a parable with a purpose, to inform the group that Mum's wishes on this matter need to be adhered to. The tone of this narrative is quite strong from Mum Harriet and targeted at a specific audience; her children and I as the interviewer.

## Communion and Confirmation Days

The O'Brien Family comprises of Jennifer who is Mum to three children, Jill aged twelve years, and twins Adam and Amy aged eight years. Jennifer and the children's

Dad John are separated, the children see him frequently. Jennifer works full time as a teacher. The family is Catholic and earlier in the year Jill was confirmed and Amy and Adam celebrated their communion.

In response to my question about 'have you any particular memories of that that you'd like to share about family that day or what you do or what was important to you about it? Amy aged eight explains how the day unfolded and what it meant to her.

> *[Amy age eight] Well I liked it because we went on the Little Railway and our Granny and Grandad were there……*
>
> *When it was Jill's confirmation like there was other children there but it was all noisy because we had music on and everything….*
>
> *but on our communion day when we were on the train in the Railway it was all quiet and we were eating like goodies and stuff in this one little carriage and we got out and looked around when the train was moving. It was so fun!*
>
> *[Jill, age twelve]  But it was spilling rain all day. Yeah.*
>
> *[Jill]…. But it didn't matter though…… It was like a really important and special day like.*
>
> *[Adam, age eight]  It was.*
>
> *[Jill] And on my confirmation then when we were having like afternoon tea in the hotel that we went to it was great to see like half of mammy's family and half of daddy's family were there and it's just really nice to see them all together, even my cousin.*

This account is solely the children speaking expressing a high degree of agency and really directing the story. Amy age eight sets the scene in her opening lines describing one of the key elements of the day, the '*little railway'* and secondly how her Granny and Grandad were there. Interestingly Amy explains how at her sister's confirmation the family were on the same railway but it was not as much fun in her opinion as the day when it was her communion.

Jill, Amy's older sister speaks next, and where it seems she realises that her day has been described in less glowing terms than Amy's. Jill responds to Amy's description with *'but it was spilling rain all day. Yeah'.* Arguably, this comment serves as a counterpoint to what Amy has just said. Clearly Jill wants to negotiate with Amy on how their respective celebrations are remembered. Immediately Jill clarifies that it didn't matter though, *'the day was very special'* Also brother Adam who has been quietly listening up to now affirms that this was so.

Jill ends the sequence by allowing herself to describe some details of her own day. There is clear evidence of conversational turn taking where each of the children describes an aspect of the day. Even though this is only a very short segment we get a tantalizing glimpse of the sibling relationships with the jostling for narration between the speakers. The little details that the children highlight are captivating and illuminating, while building the layers of the storyline.

The Giles family also recently celebrated their daughter Kirstie's communion which they recalled as a special day, the family are regular churchgoers. Below Kirstie and her family explain what the day was like. Both Mum Margaret and Dad J. P explained that their faith is important to them.

> *[KC] Can you tell me anything about that day?*
>
> *[Kirstie, age nine] We had a big bouncy castle ...Our friends were on it. Some of my friends were there and our neighbours*
>
> *[KC] And what was the best bit of the day?*
>
> *[Kirstie] The best bit was the bouncy castle.*
>
> *[J.P, Dad]  It wasn't the religious side of it then so that struck you Kirstie? (laughter)*
>
> *[Kirstie] Dad! the mass was good too, the church was so full of people that some people couldn't get a seat. But the bouncy castle was the most fun.*
>
> *[J.P] ..... yeah the church was... thronged to capacity, completely and the sweat pumping, you know when you're ... it's always awkward when you go to mass and, you know, not that we're going to go to heaven any quicker than*

*the people that are not going but when you're going you meet all these people then who don't know when to stand up or sit down ...*

*[Margaret] Up and down and in and out and nobody knows whether they should sit or kneel except for the boys and girls making their communion.*

*[J.P] Yeah, I'll keep my foot in the door with this guy just in case he does exist (laughter).*

*[Margaret] People that are non- believers 50 weeks of the year turn into religious freaks for a day (laughter).*

The story starts with Kirstie aged nine recalling playing on her bouncy castle on the day of her communion. That was the highlight she felt. Her Dad J.P. rather jokingly interjects with a question directed towards Kirstie about the *'religious side'* of the occasion. Humour here is arguably used as a device for a more serious subtext, J. P. is laughing but he has a message of slight disapproval of Kirstie's choice of highlight of the occasion. Kirstie says '*Dad!*' unhappy that she has been teased; she acknowledges that the mass was important but holds onto her original point when she restates that *'the bouncy castle was the most fun'*

This account points to a moral story similar to the Maguire family where the story is told for an effect, to get a message across. J.P and Margaret are keen to socialise their daughters in their own religious views and the topic of the conversation around the importance of the ritual reinforces their message, According to Moore and Myherhoff (1977) religious rituals can provide continuity for family members where parents can share their memories of the same ceremony with their children establishing a common thread in their lives. The story ends with a humorous exchange about church goers between Margaret and J. P., their views are similar and this allows them to dialogue together and jointly construct a very well defined moment in their lives together.

## Birthday rituals

Birthdays were explored a great deal by all the family members. Special traditions had evolved for many of the families. Ali and Grace, twins and Mum Mandy make up the Lawlor family. Even young children such as Ali and Grace who are only five

years old can give us an insight into their lives with this little narrative about their recent birthday party.

> *[KC] Can you remember anything about a special day that you had together?*
>
> *[Ali, age five] Our Birthdays!*
>
> *[Grace, age five] I love getting cake. Yeah I love eating chocolate cake.*
>
> *[Ali, age five] I love lemon cake.*
>
> *[Grace] we have big parties. Last Sunday we had a party and it was like night time.*
>
> *[Ali] Anyway what happened is we got to give out the cakes to our friends.*
>
> *[Grace] And dad came to our birthday and gave us new coats.*
>
> *[Ali] you forgot something!*
>
> *[Grace] What?*
>
> *[Ali] he gave us the littlest pet shop puppies! Remember it was when mum was hanging up the decorations for the party. And making the buns and everything.*
>
> *[Grace] Oh yeah!*
>
> *[Grace] Granny bought us a big cake with candles.*
>
> *[KC] Did you each get to blow out the candles?*
>
> *[Grace and Ali] Yeah.*
>
> *[Ali] Because we are twins.*
>
> *[Grace] That's why we're both four, now we are five.*
>
> *[Ali] Yeah.*

This excerpt has two key elements, firstly the agency of five year olds to describe in their own terms the highlights of their birthday and secondly the co- construction of

their dialogue. In a short piece of conversation we get a glimpse into the world of Grace and Ali as they negotiate the meaning of their birthday celebration between them (Phoenix 2008; Kohler Riessman 2008; Salmon and Kohler Riessman 2008). Each girl twin has a slightly different perspective; Ali reminds Grace that she forgot a detail of the Birthday that was really important, the fact that their Dad brought two gifts not one. In other ways they synchronise what they are saying especially towards the end of the story, perhaps this is because they are developmentally at a similar stage as well as spending almost all their time together. This reinforces the ecological framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979) who states that siblings can have a dynamic influence upon one another as Ali and Grace seem to have in this narrative about the joint remembering of their birthday.

In relation to the significance of Birthdays, the Barrett family add their account to the weaving of family stories. Mum and Dad Agnes and Joseph and their two daughters Erica aged seven and Rebecca, aged four describe a birthday ritual in their family.

> [KC]    Is there anything special that you do for your Birthday?
>
> [Erica, age four] We have a party.
>
> [Agnes, Mum] And we have a tradition, what does daddy do for every party for you and Rebecca?
>
> [Erica] In the morning when we open the door and come into the kitchen, he piles up loads of balloons in there and when we open the door all the balloons come out on top of us.
>
> [Rebecca, age six] Right up to the top of the door and when you open the door from the hall.  Yeah.
>
> [Erica] They all fall down, it's lovely, it is so much fun!
>
> [Rebecca] Its a hundred balloons isn't it?

This short little story about a particular birthday ritual emphasises that for each family rituals are unique and often change and evolve over time. Agnes prompts Erica, age four, to recall what they do that is special for the birthday. Erica responds

with a clear description of the event. Rebecca restates the event in her own words reinforcing what her sister has just said. Erica then leads us to the climax of the narrative, the balloons '*fall down*'. Rebecca then closes the sequence with her estimation of the number of balloons. This narrative illustrates how Agnes tries to promote her daughters' agency by supporting them to tell the familiar story. A story that they all knew and enjoyed. It serves also to tie their identity as a unit together with shared understandings. According to Kohler Riessman (2008) groups use narrative to foster a sense of belonging and group identity, and this is clearly illustrated through the Barrett family balloon ritual.

Mairead as a member of the Keyes family highlights the significance of birthdays for older children through the following conversation involving her siblings.

> *[KC] Can you tell me about any celebrations with your family?*
>
> *[Mairead, age twelve] Well it was my birthday last month, in November, we had a great day, I had like two celebrations really, my birthday and my party.*
>
> *[KC] Do you have any special traditions when celebrating your birthday?*
>
> *[Mairead] There is. Yeah we usually go to Gino's or a place and the birthday person gets to pick what they eat for dinner that day, and they get all the presents in the morning before we go to school usually and we just have a great day. So it starts kind of first thing.*
>
> *[Oisin, age nine] Yeah. For my birthday last year my mum and dad put banners saying happy birthday all over the house, every single place in the house.*

Aoife adds to Mairead and Oisin's account;

> *[Aoife, age five] Yeah. On my birthday I had a Dalmatian bouncy castle……… And I didn't just have sweets in my party bags, I had pens and bits of paper and loads of different things like that.*
>
> *[Oisin] Whoever is the birthday person we always try to make the day special for them don't we?*
>
> *[Aoife]… even if they are old like Mum and Dad! (laughter).*

Aoife the little five year old had a strong engaging personality and frequently commented last on segments of speech between the three siblings. Aoife exhibited a good sense of timing with her comments which she organised to carefully counterbalance what her older brother and sister had just said while simultaneously asserting her own identity and place in the family (Yuval-Davies 2006). She seemed to always clinch the punch line with a big burst of laughter at the end. As the youngest child in the family this practice gave Aoife the opportunity for the last word, she exhibits a great deal of personal agency for such a young child (James 1999; Christensen 2000; James and James 2004, 2008; Corsaro 2005; Greene and Hogan 2005).

## Halloween

Halloween came forward in the discussions with five of the families, on each occasion this story line was initiated by the children which generated a lot of engaging and descriptive accounts by the children involved. Below is short account by the Lawlor twins aged five years who explain that they love to celebrate Halloween.

> *[KC] Can you tell me what your favourite celebration with your family is?*
>
> *[Ali, age five] Yeah.*
>
> *[Ali and Grace] Halloween!*
>
> *[Ali] we dressed up as witches this year!…. we were scary.*
>
> *[Grace, age five] Well……… I was kind of beautiful scary.*
>
> *[Ali]  I was just scary, very scary. I've a hat and the whole costume and the tights still.*
>
> *[Grace] I had the same clothes as Ali but I had no scary mask.*
>
> *[Ali]  We had a Halloween party in school. Guess what? Everyone knew who Grace was……But they didn't know me because of the scary mask!*
>
> *[Grace]  Yeah. I was scared * sigh**

> *[Ali]  And Grace tried on a mask and she went over to the mirror and got such a fright looking at it and she decided not to get a mask. She said she's just going to put on makeup instead; she was very pretty in the end.*

This simple little narrative appears to have two stories intertwined. On the surface it is a story about celebrating Halloween and getting dressed up as told by two sisters, non-identical twins. On the other hand it is a story of the dynamic relationship between the girls. Ali appears to direct the narrative and her sister Grace responds to what she says. Firstly, Ali introduces the topic of Halloween '*we dressed up as witches this year'*, Grace then responds but her replies seem hesitant. Ali speaks next to announce confidently *'I was just scary, very scary'*. In the next line Grace echoes Ali's statement explaining that she too was scary in her costume but 'beautiful scary' Ali, midway through the narrative introduces a complicating event, that of the Halloween party in school, she explains that she was not recognised because of her scary mask; however Grace was recognised because she had no mask. Grace restates Ali's sentiment with a sigh and says she was scared. Ali closes the story with an explanation of why Grace was scared and in the last line she follows with some consolation for her sister, the fact that even though she was not scary she did look beautiful.

This story highlights the ability of very young children to articulate a story with not just content but also with pace and structure and ultimately great sensitivity. In assuming that children are competent social actors and able to speak about aspects of their lives, we can elucidate very rich stories, James (1999: 244) argues that 'observation, participation and interviewing all entail implicit assumptions about children's competency.' In this regard we need to be aware of children's agency and the contexts such as the family home that might lead them to feeling that they have greater agency to tell their stories. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is helpful here; children can be competent social actors within research, but arguably this is greatly enhanced by the presence of a supportive environment. From the above narrative it is clear that Ali displays affection and concern for her twin sister and that their relationship is complex and multi-layered. In the next excerpt the Keyes family siblings and Mum Martha describe a Halloween tradition within their family. Aoife aged five the youngest child responds to the question 'Is there anything else you would like to tell me about spending time together as a family?'

*[Aoife, age five] Yeah. Halloween!*

*[Oisin, age nine] Yeah we hang apples from the top of the door…..*

*[Mairead, age twelve] …and they hang down to around your mouth height and you have to bite a bit off, whoever gets the biggest bite off from their own apple,*

*[Martha, Mum]…they each get individual apples and whoever gets the biggest bite   off wins.*

*[Oisin] We also all get like a bucket thing, fill it with water with tonnes of apples in it, so you bob for apples and then we get to keep the apple again.*

*[Mairead] Yeah we often do barm brack and we put things in it like money, if you get money as I'm told you will be rich, if you get a stick you will beat your wife.*

*[Aoife] I got the money and the ring! (Said loudly and with laughter)*

*[Oisin] I got the stick! (laughter)*

*[Mairead] And if you get the ring you will get married.*

*[Martha] They all hate it but daddy loves this tradition.*

*[Mairead] Its potatoes and.*

*[Martha] Curly Kale.*

*[Oisin] It's called 'colcannon' but we put loads of coins in it, that's why I like it. We root out the coins.*

*[Martha] We never had the tradition of the colcannon but Donal's mother would have all these traditions, and Donal loves that tradition so we do it here every Halloween….*

*[Martha]…….we got engaged actually at Halloween, …..Donal put the ring in the barm brack.*

*[KC] Oh that's lovely.*

> *[Martha] Yeah so every year I told him now I'm always looking for something shiny like a ring.*

This story of the Keyes family at Halloween was told with great excitement and exuberance by the four narrators, Mum, Martha and her three children. This story illustrates clearly the co-construction of meaning by all the speakers, each person knew the story and complimented and extended the narrative. When each person speaks another is eagerly waiting to jump in with more of the story. At the beginning of the sequence the youngest child Aoife orientates us with the context of the story. All the way to the end of the narrative a complex dialogue of four voices engage in a richly detailed account, however we do not lose the thread of the story. This joint meaning making allows us a glimpse of the family's particular ritual and conveys their feelings about celebrating Halloween and their shared enjoyment of it, especially the children's participation in both the tradition and the telling of the story (Westcott and Littleton 2005). As researchers we need to pay attention to the notion of a child's agency as being interpersonal and supported by adults and siblings (Light and Littleton 1999). At the close of the sequence Martha the Mum resolves the tale by referring back to a special Halloween when her husband Donal hid the engagement ring in the barm brack. Although Dad Donal is not present when the story is told he is brought into the story and we can sense his presence.

## Conclusion

The key finding in this chapter is that time spent together in families often involves rituals; this relates directly to key research question when considering how families spend time together and what it means to them. In parallel the key findings herein concerning rituals weaved tightly together the issues of family identity and belonging.

Using the method of the family interview, both parents and children in this study had the opportunity to contribute their stories about special times together such as at Christmas or family birthdays. The family interview worked extremely well in elucidating richly detailed data, as it allowed for all members of the family to give extended narratives about special times and occasions in their family. According to Fahey and Lunn (2012) family types have changed in the last two decades in Ireland,

this may raise the question of whether family rituals continue to play a role in modern family life in Ireland. From the responses from the families in this chapter it is clear that rituals play a vital part in family life. In the late twenty first century, rituals are managed by smaller groups and families but nonetheless are filled with meaning for individuals in that family. Rituals can also be specific to each family and can be adapted from older family traditions; this was remarked upon by many of the families who have adapted parts of their family rituals at Christmas from their respective birth families. Family rituals can often be elaborated upon invented and reinvented as the family decide, each family comes to define what ritual means for them and allows for 'a unique and varied interpretations of what counts as ritual' (Fiese 2006: 34).

What is important in terms of celebration in one family may not be important in another family. Rituals maybe very small, and unassuming but may have a strong symbolic meaning for the people involved. According to Pleck (2000) rituals have several functions, firstly the socialisation of children within a culture, the maintaining of social order to construct a somewhat predictable society, the creation of shared identities by developing emotional bonds in individuals. Lastly, that rituals can help 'reveal the magic and meaning of religious belief' (Pleck (2000:19). Several of the families explained how this religious dimension to rituals was important to them and formed the basis of particularly memorable occasions, such as communions or confirmations which provided insightful family stories. Rituals also help link our past with our future, thereby providing continuity and consistency (Meske et al. 1994). Rituals can be protective and supportive of our well-being and of children's physical and psychological health (Fiese 2001; Fiese and Wamdboldt 2001). However Pleck (2000) argues that there can be negative aspects to family traditions and rituals. Rituals can create stress. Feminists argue that the burden of making the occasion 'perfect' fall disproportionately on women (Hochschild 1989). The enjoyment of shared special occasions can help bring a sense of belonging and identity to the group (Yuval-Davies 2006). Conversely family rituals can serve to exclude some family members and cause friction and disharmony within the group.

The area of research into family ritual is underdeveloped according to Fiese et al. (2001), for a topic that is so enmeshed with our everyday existence; it is very under researched particularly with respect to the inclusion of children's voices in the

academic literature. Bossard and Boll (1949; 1950) were the first academics to publish any research on family rituals. In their seminal work *'Ritual in family living'* Bossard and Boll (1949: 469) describe families as 'participating in a recurrent event, which involves some degree of cooperation where the members of the family promote their common life and group rapport.' All of the participating families introduced in the current chapter shared their 'common life' and 'group rapport' through the family interview and conversation that involved the cooperation of all family members. This group rapport was highly supportive and provided the basis from which new rituals emerged to enhance family life. Rituals are practiced within families, but draw on wider societal and cultural norms and values. This is a dynamic process whereby a family's celebration of an event like Christmas is shaped by the society and culture they live in, nonetheless it is also influenced by internal factors such as the age of the children and the particular needs of each individual in the family. This interactive play of internal and external factors on the practice of family rituals reiterates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model of human development as a framework for honouring the place of rituals within the families interviewed, this leads the researcher to naturally explore the next weave in the tapestry of family life; that being the spaces and places that families' in which rituals are performed and practiced.

# Chapter 8 Analysis and discussion of family spaces

## Introduction

> 'Home is variously described in the literature as conflated with or related to house, family haven, self, gender and journeying'
>
> (Mallet 2004:1)

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the family interviews relating to space use in the home. The chapter begins by outlining the various ways in which the families who participated in this study used the spaces in their houses and gardens. These accounts as in the previous two chapters will be thematically analysed using narrative analysis as outlined by Kohler Riessman (1993a, 2008) and pertinent theoretical perspectives on space use will also be interwoven woven into the discussion at relevant points to extend the analysis of the family interviews.

With the exception of Gabb (2008) very little has been written academically about space use in the home, there is also a relative lack of research into children's views on the spaces they use in general, although Valentine (2001, 2004) is a notable exception. The chapter aims to address this inherent gap in the literature. These research findings highlight the importance of children's accounts of the spaces they use in their homes and the activities undertaken in these spaces. Much of the literature that relates to children and space use focuses on architecture such as schools (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Loxley et al. 2011) and on areas designed specifically for children such as playgrounds (Aitken 1994) rather than domestic space use. The emphasis in this research with families in an Irish context is on children as active agents. Placing value on their stories of how and where they carry out their own personal routines in the spaces within the home and family context (James et al. 1997; Valentine 2001, 2004; Corsaro 2005; Christensen and James 2008; Roberts 2008).

How families use spaces is linked to the overarching research question in this study; specifically how do families spend their time together? Time has to be spent somewhere, and most family time is spent in the family home and garden. Notably, in this research eleven out of the twelve families interviewed described in detail various spaces where they spend time together. A further eight of the twelve families spoke about travelling in the car together which can be conceptualised as another form of space sharing and an extension of the home.

For younger children play is very closely tied to space use, most of the places children describe in their responses involve play, whether indoor, outdoor or imaginary play. As in previous chapters the accounts that the children give are often 'scaffolded' by their parents in a joint narrative construction (Vygotsky 1978). Fear of crime and traffic can mean that children are frequently encouraged to restrict play to the indoors, to the confines or the garden or supervised in play parks (Valentine 2001; Gill 2007, Furedi 2008). A space that many families share on a very regular basis is the space of the car, travelling to work, school, crèche, relatives or just for leisure is an intrinsic part of many families daily existence (Daly 2007). In this chapter the theme of space use was subdivided into several sub themes. The first sub theme to be considered will be negotiating space, then outdoor space, intimate spaces, connected spaces, private spaces, gendered spaces, technology and spaces, and lastly spaces of the family car. All these sub themes will be narratively analysed and discussed in the light of previous research on space use in family contexts.

## Geographical spaces

Family space as a concept can often refer geographical location as well as more localised spaces within the home. The spaces and places that families use are physical in nature as the O'Brien children point out. This brief but interesting exchange was in response to my question 'Can you tell about your home'?

> *[Amy, age nine] It's on the border between County Wexford and Co. Kilkenny*

> *[Jill age twelve]  You see… the kitchen is Kilkenny and the sitting room is Wexford.  Adam's bedroom and my bedroom are Kilkenny and Amy's*

*bedroom and mammy's bedroom are in Wexford. It's very frustrating, there are brothers and sisters and they're living in different counties (laughter).*

And yet this physical dimension is only one aspect of the complexities of family space use. The home is also a social space, a place where familial relationships are enacted and where the business of everyday living is located, Munro and Madigan (1999:107) aptly express this idea, by stating that 'The concept of 'home' embraces both a physical and social space; the house itself is home as are the social relations within it.'

## Negotiating spaces

Spaces at home are used by multiple members of the family, often at the same time. This space use frequently requires collaboration and negotiation between siblings, and parents and children. The following accounts in this section outline some of the families' stories about negotiating spaces. Sorcha, aged 11 years, one of a family of four children describes her sister, who gets to sit on the 'best' bit of the sofa,

*'No, dad will normally sit there, then we would be sitting here fighting over the couch, Heidi always gets the laptop the most and has the cosiest bit of the couch as well.'*

Family members often have an idea of how they want to use the spaces in the home but this has to be worked out with other family member's ideas and plans. Martha Keyes a mother of three children is trying to negotiate some space for a home office, although she is uncertain about how it will work out.

*[Martha] We just moved a pile of clutter from out little room beside the dining room. I would love to make it a home office you know……..somewhere where I can spread out my papers for work and know they won't get disturbed. But the children are lobbying to turn it into a play room or games room and I've a feeling that is what my little room will become'*

The Hanlon family, Mum Ursula and Dad Bill live with their four daughters in a converted barn in the countryside. Their home is currently undergoing some renovations while Dad Bill is temporarily unemployed. Many of the families who were interviewed explained that their children shared bedroom and that this could be

a very positive experience while other families expressed that it could create conflict and tension. In response to my question *'do you all sleep in the same room?'* Sile the eldest of the Hanlon children explains;

> *[Sile age twelve] Well I slept with Ciara when she was a baby. Now I share with Sorcha……..sigh\**
>
> *[Mum, Ursula] Oh you did yes….. for a little while it was because Ciara took a very bad fall out of the cot when she was about six months old. So I put the girls together, so that Sile could look after Ciara. But after a while you weren't getting on so well…..so….*
>
> *[Sorcha age eleven] No! I was sleeping with her when she was a baby, not Sile.*
>
> *[Mum, Ursula] You did as well.*
>
> *[Sorcha] I remember getting out of my bed and coming down and picking up her 'dodey' and giving it back to her and going back up, I remember that, it was so annoying in the middle of the night! So it was me who looked after Ciara!*
>
> *[Mum, Ursula] But now Bill is converting the upstairs into two bedrooms so the girls will have their own room each which is a blessing. So Sile and Sorcha are going upstairs into the new loft conversion and so they will have their own separate rooms up there. So it's a room cut in half, kind of.*
>
> *[KC] So are you looking forward to that or do you think you will miss having your sister in the room?*
>
> *[Sorcha] No. I won't.*

This narrative excerpt expresses the multi layered complexities of family life. Although the question is quite straightforward the answer is not. Sile the oldest of the Hanlon children answers first explaining that a few years ago she shared her bedroom with her baby sister but now she shares with her sister Sorcha who is close in age to her, she sighs at the end of her sentence perhaps indicating that she is not entirely happy about this situation.

The next person to speak is Mum Ursula who supports Sile's account of looking after baby Ciara but adding the complicating action that this occurred because of an accident when Ciara fell out of bed. According to Labov (1972) a complicating action is a point where the speaker adds a new twist to the story illuminating the audience to some past event relating to the narrative. Ursula further orientates us by adding that after a while the arrangement wasn't working, she begins to explain further but she is interrupted by her other daughter Sorcha.

At this point Sorcha insists that she also shared a room with her baby sister; she reinforces her account by providing the listeners with a vivid memory of having to find her sister's dodey in the night. Ursula affirms this account by Sorcha when she says 'you did as well'. This points to the close attention that Ursula is paying to the story. Ursula explains next that her husband is renovating so the girls will have a new divided room to provide them with much needed personal space. The narrative comes to a close when I ask the final prompt about whether they girls will miss each other and Sorcha replies quite simply with 'No'! Christensen (1999:148) aptly describes family conflicts over space thus;

> These disputes between family members over time and space in the home are inextricably linked to the tension underlying the values attached to the rights, privileges and independence of family members and those which promote family 'togetherness' for example reciprocity, mutual responsibility and family solidarity.

The same space can be used in a number of different ways and children are particularly adept at managing to use space in imaginative ways (Aitken 1994, Valentine 2001). The Barrett family consist of Mum, Agnes, Dad, Joseph and their two daughters, Erica age seven and Rebecca age four. In this extract Mum Agnes and Dad Joseph speak about how their daughters enjoy creating their own spaces. They describe how they consider it important to allow the girls the opportunity to create free space to play in.

*[KC] Where do the children play?*

*[Agnes, Mum] The girls tend to negotiate their play space and they use the spare bedroom as well when they are playing, if there's friends in the play gets extended, so they might be using the sitting room, sometimes there's a game where there's vets and that's the sitting room and they turn that into*

*the vets surgery and then the bedroom might be their home and the playroom might be another room in it where they are going for their food or whatever, so they use the full run of the house in the course of the day, they might start off in their bedrooms and they could end up anywhere.*

*[KC]   Yeah.*

*[Joseph, Dad] And the girls love to use an old cardboard box, they are using one at the moment that the washing machine came in and the girls have painted that and that's in the back bedroom, it's about this high so they can use it to block off the hall and they make a kennels and things like that, so there's a lot of creative play.*

Agnes the Mum in the Barrett family describes in a long narrative that her daughters negotiate their play space during the course of the day, extending their play spatially as well as imaginatively as they go from room to room. There is a sense from the narrative that this play is unrestricted in terms of space use and this hinges upon Agnes's desire to create space for the girls to play freely. Dad Joseph speaks next and adds to Agnes's story, he provides additional information to support the topic of imaginative play, giving the example of the girls using a cardboard box for make believe activities. Joseph and Agnes co-construct the story of their daughter's space use as they dovetail their responses about where their children play (Kohler Riessman 2008).

Joseph and Agnes further explain that the outdoors is also used as a place with multiple functions for the children.

*[Joseph]  It's hard to explain exactly what the girls like to do, they climb the trees in the front and that's what they call their tree house out in the tress…. there's nothing in it, it's an imaginary space, it's just the tree is in the ditch but because you can't see them when they are in it, it's very much their own little place.*

*[Agnes] It's wonderful to have a totally free space and there is actually no man made things in it at all. But they very much have it as their particular*

*space in their heads. I suppose I would be very aware of them needing that space, so I would be very conscious of helping them make it and keeping a clear space for it to happen.*

The couple weave a very coherent account of their daughters' play activity and there is a sense of keen observation and an appreciation for the girls' free play outdoors. Agnes at the end of the narrative piece expresses a particular philosophical stance when she says '*I would be very conscious of helping them make it and keeping a clear space for it to happen*' It appears that it is important for the couple to negotiate a space of possibilities for their children in their home. The activities that are spoken about are unscheduled which is becoming less common according to Furedi (2008) who argues that children are increasingly spending time in scheduled and structured activities.

## Outside space

As the excerpt above suggests, outdoor space featured in the family interviews with ten out twelve families bringing this narrative to the fore. Gardens and outdoor play featured in all of the children's accounts. Weather was a frequent variable in whether kids went out and about. In the excerpt below Jeff aged nine from the Walsh family talks about how he and his cousin Aidan like to play outside.

*[KC] Where do you like to play?*

*[Sharon]… in the summer time when Aidan comes down for you, you play outside with Aiden then don't you?*

*[Jeff, age nine] Yeah in our house we always play outside when Aidan comes. Mum says it's always outside first, games second, that's the rules……* pause* … *I don't mind though I love to kick the football….. we take turns shooting at the goal.*

*[Sharon] I don't love it when he kicks the football inside though! (laughter)*

This short piece highlights the relationship between Jeff and his mum Sharon, even though ostensibly the question related to places to play the answer gives the listener a little more information, this brief exchange illustrates the unspoken rules of inside/outside play as negotiated and understood by mother and son. Wood and Beck

(1990, 1994) suggest that home life can be governed by many complex rules about the organising of spatial boundaries. While rules may seem to be self evident parents frequently repeat them to their children. Rules can be universal and may reflect social norms but also may be specific to a particular household and family.

The following excerpt from the Lawlor family, Mum Mandy and her non-identical twin daughters Ali and Grace illustrates the use of outside space as described by very young children. The family live in a rural location adjacent to a wood, where they often spend time together. In answer to my question *'where do you play when you are at home'?* The girls reply with the following,

> *[Grace, age five] We go for walks in the woods sometimes, but we haven't done that for ages.*

> *[KC]   Oh that sounds very nice, so who goes on the walks in the woods?*

> *[Grace] Me and Ali and sometimes grandad and nana.*

> *[Ali, age five]  And mum but sometimes grandad and grandma.*

> *[KC] And what do you do in the woods?*

> *[Grace] We run and play and sometimes we explore by ourselves……... long pause*……..  can I tell you about something that happened? (whisper\*)*

> *[KC] Yes, please do.*

> *[Grace] Once we heard a little noise in the bushes….then I saw it…. a fox!*

> *[Ali]  Yes. A fox…..sometimes at night foxes come out but we usually don't see animals at the morning, but this time we did!*

> *[Grace] Yeah and hedgehogs live there.*

> *[KC]   Oh have you seen a hedgehog recently?*

> *[Ali]   No… but one lives under our shed where we keep our bikes. We wouldn't touch them or pick them up because then you will hurt them.*

> *[Ali] I know what they eat. They eat Weetabix.*

*[Grace]  Silly! They eat dog food.*

This narrative between the two sisters is a very closely interwoven story involving one of the girls play spaces. The question '*where do you like to play*?' is directly answered at the outset by Grace who explains quite simply that the family like to walk in the woods. About half way through the story Grace adds an interesting new dimension to the tale; she introduces the subject of the fox which builds up in intensity with the inclusion of a long pause before she speaks. She also whispers '*Can I tell you about something that happened?*' which adds to the sense of drama building. In the next line Grace introduces the fox as the first character in the story. Ali then supports what Grace has said by saying '*Yes*', then she adds her own perspective on the event of seeing the fox stating that they don't often see animals in daylight. Next Grace introduces another animal into the story, the hedgehog.

The girls appear very familiar with the story; it is a good example of co-construction of narrative where is a sense of a shared understanding between the siblings when jointly recounting the stories of the fox and the hedgehog (Kohler Riessman 2008). There is a subtle aspect to this narrative sequence in that Grace leads the dialogue while Ali comments on what her sister says, expanding the story with her memories of the events.  Grace also gets the last word in the story correcting her sister about what hedgehogs actually eat, dog food and not Weetabix. The girls told this account factually. It was not for comic effect. Mandy Lawlor, the girls' mother explained that the girls spend a great deal of time playing in the natural environment around their home. Skår and Krogh (2009) who conducted research in Norway claim that children are now likely to be engaged in structured activities devised by adults rather than in spontaneous activities in the natural environment. They add that in recent years there has been a decline in the amount of time that children are able to engage in self-directed play outside, so arguably the girls are fortunate in this respect with such access to nature so close by their home.

Some parents within this research like Agnes and Joseph Barrett explain that they place great importance on their children being able to play and spend time in the outdoors. Agnes explains their philosophy of parenting in respect to playing outdoors.

> *[Agnes, Mum] Well Joseph was brought up in a town and I lived out the country but we would have had a similar experience in that outside was a big part of our lives Joseph really did not want to bring up the children in a town where they were hemmed in by concrete. I think that's very important for children to be free and so would Joseph and that they are physically active as much as possible. The philosophy is very much what I'd call life space education, which is daily life experience is for learning purposes you know.*

The countryside is frequently constructed as a rural idyll and an idyllic for children's play and exploration (Aitken 1994; Sibley 1995b; Jones 2000). Urban environments are often spoken about in negative terms by comparison according to Jones (2000); this seems to be the case for Agnes's narrative when she explains that her husband did not want the children to be '*hemmed in by concrete*'. She ends the narrative by underpinning what she has said previously about the importance of the children being allowed to be free in outside space by saying that it is part of a broader philosophy of parenting as assumed by Agnes and Joseph as a parenting couple. The construction of countryside space as pure space is important to people because according to Sibley (1999:115) 'familiarity and predictability are important to many people. There is a common desire to live in a place which is stable and orderly'. This aspiration is what is being conveyed by Agnes in her account, a palpable desire to bring up the children in a healthy and pure environment.

## Space of imagination

The next sub section will consider the spaces of play and imagination. The children in five of the families interviewed referred to special places where they loved to play. These were dens or cubbies, places that the children had spontaneously created for themselves (Jones 2000; Valentine 2001). According to many authors children play mostly in space constructed by adults, in playgrounds and leisure centres for example (Aitken 1994; Sibley 1995a; Jones 2000). There is move away from playing in unstructured spaces possible because of fears about children's safety (Valentine 2001; 2004; Palmer 2006; Furedi 2008).This topic elucidated some of the most animated and descriptive accounts by the children. In the last segment the Barrett

parents gave their account of their aspirations for their daughters to play in nature. Below their children Rebecca and Erica add their voices about the spaces they enjoy using, describing their '*den in the ditch*'.

[KC]  *I noticed you've got some lovely places that you play in outside, can you tell me about those?*

[Rebecca age four] *Yeah well we made a den in the ditch.*

[KC]   *Oh tell me about that.*

[Erica age seven] *One day we got some clippers and we clipped down all the brambles and made a little den. Yeah. And we got some sheets and put them out there. And it has a little couch.*

[Rebecca]      *Out there in the ditch…. instead of a proper couch.*

[KC]   *And is there anything else in your den in the ditch?*

[Rebecca]      *Ivy.*

[Erica]      *And nettles………. And a tree but we don't climb that tree because it is a holly tree and it is too spiky*

[Rebecca]      *We can climb the other trees nearest to the gate though.*

[Erica]          *Yeah that's our play house, it's in the tree up a ladder.*

[Rebecca]      *We have a little oven in there and.*

[Erica]          *I got that from my cousin, mammy said we couldn't put it anywhere else so we put it up there.*

[KC]   *Oh right and so do you play a lot in that little house?*

[Rebecca]      *No.*

[Erica]      *We like the den in the ditch better because we play school there.*

This story of the den is constructed by the sisters and it paints a vivid picture of their play space in their garden. The girls needed very little prompting to describe their 'den'. Each word in the dialogue came tumbling out and each girl hurriedly adds her

voice as her sister highlights some aspect of the décor of the den. At times they over-speak and it was hard to untangle their voices, the whole narrative sequence was much longer than what is represented here.  Their co-construction of this story is very closely woven, they seem to anticipate each other's response and they dove-tail their conversation accordingly (Kohler Riessman 2008). Agnes, their mother is present during their story telling but she doesn't speak, the girls were highly autonomous in their participation in this narrative (Dunn 2005; Greene and Hogan 2005; Corsaro 2005). This story is told by the girls in the garden and as they spoke they pointed out the areas they were referring to in their narrative. The story ends with a description of their tree-house, a place in the natural environment but constructed by their Dad, it even has its own little oven. However, Erica says they still prefer the den in the ditch because 'we play school there' which allows more scope for their imagination. According to Jones (2000) modern children play in over regulated, over structured environments, he in turn argues that there is a need for flexible spaces, a childhood domain. Rebecca and Erica seem to have such a domain in their den and their joy at describing the den is perceptible. In the next story the three O'Brien children and their Mum Jennifer describe their special places. In answer to my question 'Where do you play?' Jennifer the Mum answers first but does not speak again.

> *[Jennifer, Mum] They made a den in the garage – oh yeah – we tidied up the garage so they have a den.*

> *[Jill age twelve]  It's kind of like our own little space, we're trying to do private things, – Mammy doesn't know what we talk about in there and stuff……Yeah and we keep all our outdoor stuff and old shoes, for playing outside, and then a lot of our dad's old trophies from racing and stuff like that and mammy's plaque for when she was doing the – it wasn't career guidance? Yes well – something like that. Yeah. And [Adam] we have Irish flags up as well. We've got two Irish flags and we have a dartboard if we get bored but we can't find any of the darts. (laughs)*

> *[Amy age nine] Yeah. Like  it's a little place to do drawings and where we can play with our bears and Barbie's, you see we're going camping today*

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*with our dad ………... and we were making like shopping lists – plan our shopping – and plans, where we're going to put the tent and everything.*

*[Jill] We're going down to camp near a river with our cousins.*

*[KC]So you're going down to camp tonight ...*

*[Jill] Well our cousin we think has a tent.*

*[Amy] Yeah she does! mammy said she does.*

*[Adam] But we don't have enough tents so me and my cousin are going to sleep in the back of the Jeep….. (laughter)*

*[Jill] We have to clear out the back of the Jeep ourselves. You wouldn't want to see it here's like ten million golf sets in there and golf balls everywhere.*

Mum Jennifer begins this family narrative by setting the scene to the story of the den, she orientates the listener by explaining that they tidied up the garage so that space for a 'den' became available (Labov 1982). Jill the eldest child in the family takes ownership of the story at this point expressing that the den is '*our own little space'* there is feeling from her choice of words that a boundary has been created within the space of the den, Jill goes on to say that *'Mammy doesn't know what we talk about'*. In order to demarcate a space that is separate than the space used by adults, children often personalise the room or den by adding items that are important to their play and experience (Sibley 1995b; Griffiths and Gilly 2012). Notably though, Jill talks about some objects owned by her parents in the past that now inhabit the den. Amy speaks next and explains the function of the space, which is to do creative activities and also to plan for shopping and trips away, the introduction of this subject seems to be the main plot in the whole narrative (Kohler Riessman 2008). Jill clarifies what Amy has just said and explains that they are going camping.

The story takes a different turn then, away from the den and into the logistics of the camping trip, there seems to be some uncertainty about the availability of tents, Adam says they may have to sleep in a Jeep, this brings great mirth and everybody laughs. Jill the eldest closes the story leaving us with a practical problem to ponder on and an image of a Jeep full of golf balls. Within current debates concerned with

the impact of close adult regulation of children's space (Wood and Beck 1990; McNeish and Roberts 1995; Sibley 1995a; Valentine 2001) there is a fear that children are not provided with enough pure space in order to construct their play spaces. It is evident from this family narrative that with the clearing of the garage in the O'Brien home a space became available for the children to use, one which they have successfully harnessed for their own imaginative play. It is also important to note through this analysis that the stereotypically adult spaces of the garage at home at the O'Briens and Dad's car needed to be 'cleared' in order to make space for the children because their parents are separated. The experience of separation for children often manifests itself in sharing very different and diverse spaces compared with children whose parents are not separated.

This phenomenon was also gleaned in the earlier explorations of Jeff's experiences of Christmas day where he had to divide his time among the spaces that both his parents occupied since they did not live in the same house. The analysis of space per se is therefore crucial to any in-depth understanding of childhoods given the myriad of family types therein. The inclusion of separated families and the subsequent analysis of 'space' will undoubtedly become more important to both psychological and sociological analyses of family lives.

## Personal Spaces

During the family interviews the concept of shared space emerged very strongly, eight of the families expressed that they had made a deliberate choice whether their children shared a room or had their own room. Space use can mirror the development of the children, when children are very young they may share their parent's bed or room as the get older they move into their own spaces (Spiegel 1992). It is interesting to note from the findings in this research that the families with younger children tended to organise their sleeping arrangements with (a) the children sharing a room or (b) where the children were easily able to move between the parent's bedroom and their own. Whereas the families' with older children were currently either in a transition phase between the children moving to their own rooms or the children already had their rooms allocated to them.

> *[KC] Does Louisa have her own room at this stage?*

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*[Monica, Mum] She does yeah, she's in it a couple of years since she was about three I'd say……..I'm trying to think even….It's hard to…. Yeah she was two and a half, coming on three by the time she got into the bed I think…….Yeah the transition from cot to bed you kind of forget, you think they never go from the cot and then they do………I think she was gone two, I think she was gone two yeah, I'm trying to remember yeah.*

*[KC] And does she play much in her room?*

*[Monica] She does, I suppose because being an only child she tends to either play, she will play upstairs, but only if I'm upstairs you know she tends to follow me up. Wherever I go in the house she is there behind me, my little shadow….I suppose because I am at work during the day when we are at home she wants to be close to me.*

In this short narrative Monica casts back in time to remember at what stage her daughter went into her own room it seems to have been a gradual phasing as it appears that Monica cannot pinpoint a time in her memory that stands out. This piece ends with the key piece of information that although Louisa age five now has her own room she will not play in it unless her mother is upstairs. This desire to be in the presence of her mother influences Louisa's use of space in their home. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998: 1013) call this presence 'the centre of gravity' for the developing person. This example also links to the idea of Bronfenbrenner's (1994:1645) definition of the microsystem where development occurs is facilitated by;

> A pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face to face setting with a particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment.

Space use and time spent together are enmeshed for Louisa and Monica; their interactions are sustaining not just their relationship but also Louisa's growth and development. This movement through spaces in the home is echoed by the Giles family in the next segment. Mum Margaret, Dad J. P and their daughters Kirstie and

Lily describe how moving to their new larger house has caused a change in their space use and consequently their routines.

> *[KC] And do you have your own room?*
>
> *[Kirstie, age nine] Yeah, that is where we have our stories and sleep and sometimes play. I haven't had a story for ages though*
>
> *[Margaret, Mum] Well I probably would have read to the girls more so in previous years, but funnily enough not much in the last 3 months now.. Yeah in our old house we were more structured…..*
>
> *……… Yeah, you see the two of them were in the one room in the other house whereas they're have been kind of being polarised in this new bigger house. I used to read to them together in the one bedroom that they shared. But now I have to go between the two bedrooms which can cause some friction! (laughter).*
>
> *[KC] Oh right, it's interesting, so it's actually working a little bit differently because the girls have their own rooms?*
>
> *[J P, Dad] Yeah. Well Kirstie would be the more serious and wants her own quiet space, so Lily was banished to her own room them, weren't you Lily?*
>
> *[Lily, age six] Yeah. But I still get a story because I can't read well yet but Kirstie is able to read big books by herself so she doesn't need Mum like I do.*

Kirstie, the eldest of the two children begins this narrative sequence by explaining the multiple functions of her room, it is used for sleep but also for play and stories. At the end of the first line she remarks that she has not had a story for some time, Mum Margaret picks up on her comment and refers back to a time when she would have regularly read both girls stories at bedtime, this serves to orient the listener to what is to come next. Kohler Riessman (2008) remarks that the speaker tends to connect events in a sequence that makes coherent sense for the listener and sets the scene for the next part of the story. Margaret goes on to explain that when they lived in their old house the girls shared a room and therefore she would to read them both

together at bedtime. Now that they have moved, the spaces have changed and Margaret has to shuttle between the girls rooms at bedtime, she mentions that this can cause conflict but all of the family members laugh at this point. Gabb (2008) suggests that humour can be used as a device to manage disagreements between family members.

According to Cieraad (2002) the layout of modern homes can influence how the family use the spaces in the house; this would seem to be the case for the Giles family. Moving to a bigger home has separated the girls into their own bedrooms leading to changed routines and rituals. J.P the Dad in the family speaks next adding to his wife Margaret's account giving more detail about the rationale behind the change in their organisation of family space. Lily speaks last and closes the sequence by returning back to what her mother and sister said at the outset about the bedtime stories, she explains that she still has a story but justifies this because she cannot read by herself as well as her sister. Even though each person in the family only contributes a line or two of dialogue, the listener can appreciate a very complex and multi-faceted picture of the bedtime routine in the family and how it has changed with the recent move to the new house.

When family members explained their space use at home especially in relation to shared rooms a very significant aspect of their lives is apparent. In the excerpt below Ali and Grace from the Lawlor family together with their Mum Mandy explain how they love to share the close space of their Mum's bedroom.

> *[KC]  And where do you have your stories?*
>
> *[Ali, age five] We have them downstairs in the playroom sometimes but my favourite is when we have them upstairs in the bedroom in bed.*
>
> *[Mum, Mandy] I have one either side of me normally.*
>
> *[Ali] …In bed with Mom, it's so cosy. (laughter)*
>
> *[Grace, age five] Yeah. Well we say our prayers then too, we pray for our auntie's baby, don't we?*
>
> *[Ali] Yes, soon we will have a new cousin.*

*[KC] And do you share a room?*

*[Ali and Grace] Yeah. We share a bed.*

*[Mandy] Yeah. They've been in since babies, we have the biggest bed in the world, and we have a double bed and two singles pushed together.*

*[Ali]   We love to roll around in our big bed after we wake up in the morning (laughter).*

*[Grace] It is enormous (laughter).*

Within this dialogue, the three members of the family explain where they have their story time. This very intimate snapshot of family life illuminates the very personal qualities of lived experience for many families (Smart 2007). Smart (2007) focusses on the connectedness of family members in her research and this concept has a resonance with the findings in this research with families. The emotional connectedness between Mandy Lawlor and her daughters and between Monica Shee and her daughter Louisa demonstrate the practises of nurturance and of affection that are carried out in the personal space of the home. Similar to the last excerpt the following narrative account outlines this very personal space between parent and child. I ask Louisa Shee about the spaces that she and her Mum use at home.

*[KC] And Louisa do you think I forgot to ask you anything about where you spend time with your mum?*

*[Monica, Mum] What did you forget to tell her, what's your favourite thing to do in the morning?*

*[Louisa age five]- Get in Mammy's bed! (laughter)*

*[KC] So when you wake up do you go into mum?*

*[Louisa] Sometimes I get to sleep in mammy's bed.*

*[Monica] And you are only small and sometimes you get lonely in your own bed don't you? Everybody does.*

*[Louisa] Sometimes after being sick….pause… the last time I got really sick in mammy's bed.*

*[Monica] You did…… and it was okay we had a towel.*

*[Louisa] I fell asleep and then I was better.*

Even though the question is addressed to Louisa, she hesitates to respond at first, Monica her Mum has to prompt Louisa and clarify the context of the question. Monica, in common with many of the parents who were interviewed alongside their children engaged in a supportive role to their children, frequently scaffolding and prompting them in their responses (Vygotsky 1978). Louisa then enthusiastically responds to her mother's prompt and loudly declares that she loves to get in Mammy's bed. Monica extends what her daughter has said by soothingly saying that it is fine to be in Mammy's bed. This triggers a memory for Louisa, a time when she was sick and she appreciated her mother's company, Monica responds and reassures Louisa that this was okay. Between the mother and daughter this shared retelling of an event of Louisa being sick in her Mum's bed allows them to 'make sense of their own family practices of intimacy' (Gabb 2008:133). These two narratives from Monica and Louisa Shee and Mandy, Ali and Grace Lawlor illustrate 'the significance of the lived context of intimacy, something that reinforces public - private boundaries around forms of intimacy (Gabb 2008:133).

## Connected Spaces

Children can also practice great personal agency in the telling of their stories and may not need any prompts from family members (Christensen and Prout 2005; Westcott and Littleton 2005; Wyness 2006). Below is a story from Aoife Keyes, age five years, the youngest of the Keyes family. She lives in the countryside with her parents, Martha and Donal, her older brother Oisin and older sister Mairead. In response to my question, *Can you tell me about your bedroom?* Aoife speaks about the library in her room, she is very precise about the layout of her room and she gesticulates as she describes where her bed and library are

*[Aoife, age five] I have a book in my library that I never read. because I have so much books.*

*[KC]   Do you have your library in your room?*

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*[Aoife] Yeah. But I have two ones at the side of the bed but they are just small libraries. So it's like a big library when you put them together. It's just the one giant library except there's a line going through it. Yeah, like two shelves but attaching. My bed is like here, in the organisation of my room, like this part would be my bed.*

*[KC]   Okay.*

*[Aoife]  But my bed isn't that long, it's not taking up the whole room, and it's a space like here and that's all a big space and the library is about here, so it's not equal because the library is kind of bigger than my bed.*

*[KC]   Okay I understand that was very clear, do you play in your room Aoife?*

*[Aoife] Yeah a lot with my babies, I got this huge step for my birthday last year, it's huge, it takes up, we had to make a big space to fit it in, it's really hard to fit in, it was really hard to fit in my room, there's loads of things behind it, that's how big it is, we couldn't fit it into the attic we put stuff behind it.*

Aoife although only five years, is very articulate and able to build up a very clear picture of her room and the objects inside it. Aoife is able to affirm her own agency by coherently expressing her viewpoint throughout her narrative very effectively, drawing in the listener (James and James 2004). Sibley (1995b) argues that family members create boundaries around their own spaces by using personal possessions and objects to delineate their own zones. Arguably Aoife is doing this by relating the story about all the books in her library, she explains to the listener that she has so many books, that she has not even read them all. Aoife also includes the description of the big step in her room, in doing so she creates strong image of what her room is like. At this point Aoife's older sister Mairead joins in the conversation, explaining that she and Aoife have inter-connecting rooms so they have quite a bit of contact.

*[Mairead, age twelve] Our bedrooms are close together, you go into Aoife's room, then mine. They are inter-connecting rooms.*

*[KC]   Oh I see so...*

*[Aoife, age five] ... because like at Mairead's party you see her friends had to walk through my bedroom, then it's on to Mairead's bedroom.*

*[KC] Okay*

*[Aoife] Yeah and when she is walking into my bedroom she always says goodnight to me and she kisses me on the head.*

*[Mairead] Yeah and she's always awake…….. I have to make a path through her toys to get to my room (laughter).*

*[Aoife] Yeah I never get to sleep.*

*[Mairead] When she sees the door open she's like lying down again pretending she will never wake up. So you are listening, you can hear.*

*[Aoife]Yeah because I pretend a little bit.*

*[Mairead] She's the comedian of the family.*

*[Aoife]Yeah. Like I pretend to snore (laughter).*

According to Christensen et al. (2000) children are able to assert themselves in regard to sharing space as illustrated in the above piece, where Aoife uses her sense of comic storytelling to assert her position in the inter-connecting room shared with her sister Mairead. The sisters mutually construct this little story of a familiar routine in their home brought about partially because of their domestic space use. Mairead goes to bed after her little sister Aoife and has to pass through Aoife's toy strewn room to get to her own room. The little ritual that they practice each night is that Mairead says goodnight and kisses Aoife's head while Aoife pretends to be asleep. They both laugh all the way through the telling of this story. There is a sense of shared belonging and understanding in their account that is very private and yet relates to a common thread amongst many families (Yuval - Davies 2006).

The Barrett parents Agnes and Joseph share their views in this narrative account where they outline their thoughts on family togetherness. The Barrett's live with their daughters, Erica and Rebecca in a spacious house in the countryside. Joseph speaks first in response to the question *'Do the girls have their own rooms?'* Agnes then responds to Joseph's account.

> *[Joseph, Dad] It gives quite an emphasis on togetherness as a family, so we share bedrooms, Rebecca and Erica share a bedroom, even though we have five bedrooms the children share a room……… and they will share a room. And that's a choice yeah. And they will share a room for a number of years you know, as they're growing together, there's kind of a relationship rather than dividing them into separate rooms*

> *[KC]   Yeah.*

> *[Agnes, Mum] ... which I think with different bedrooms there's separateness, do you know.  And yet there's space for the girls, the girls will often say I would like to play by myself for a while and then we agree with Rebecca and let her play in the bedroom and she will play in the playroom or Erica might go into our bedroom and play in there for a while if she wants to be by herself, so it's about also verbalising what your need is and then trying to meet it, rather than just separating.*

Parents, Joseph and Agnes construct the account jointly, and each parent seems to be in tune with the other's values about space sharing (Kohler Riessman 2008; Phoenix 2008). There is a sense of agreement about how they will encourage their daughters to share space, Joseph uses the words '*as they're growing together*' which seems to evoke a desire to facilitate a connectedness as a family (Smart 2007). Agnes affirms her husband's view of space sharing when she speaks in the first line of her response. Her choice of word '*separateness*' conveys that she too wishes for connectedness between the family members while at the same time responding to their needs when they are verbalised. It is evident that both parents are in harmony in respect of this particular parenting value.

## Private spaces

Bedrooms can also be 'privatised spaces' spaces where older children and teenagers may retreat into their own domain (Sibley 1995b; Valentine 2001:88). Older children and teenagers' use of technology such as mobile phones, televisions and laptops can separate them from the rest of the home (Spiegel 1992; Van Rompaey and Roe 2001; Livingstone 2009). In this exchange below Elaine Maguire the youngest of the four

Maguire children lives with her parents and two older brothers. Here she describes how she uses her room.

> [KC] 'Elaine do you share your room?
>
> [Elaine age fifteen]    No I've got a bunk bed but it's my own room. I used to share with my sister but she has moved out now.
>
> [KC]   And do you have people over for sleep over's or anything like that?
>
> [Elaine] Yeah I would, usually if it was like a Birthday or something I would usually have like loads of people over and we would sleep in the sitting room, but if it's just like one person we would sleep in my bedroom. I've got all my stuff there so it's easier. We can chat and listen to music.
>
> [KC]   And do you spend much time in your room?
>
> [Elaine] Sometimes, not really, I usually I watch TV, or I'm on the laptop but I wouldn't stay up here because my room is kind of cold, so like I've got a new heater so it's not cold anymore.
>
> [KC]   Do you think you are gravitating towards the company more than the heat?
>
> [Elaine] Yeah because when you have to go there and do homework on the weekends it's just like oh yeah, so boring..... it's like you are missing something that's going on in the rest of the house.

Space use in the family home is also tied to time use and routines as well as the developmental stages of the children. Munro and Madigan (1999:114) suggest that spaces at home may be described as 'time zoned' that is to say that if children use the living room to watch television during the early evening their parents or older siblings will use them same space at a later time of the day Elaine describes her room as being a space where she can entertain her friends at home although she does use other parts of the house as well. Her friends can sleep in the sitting room after her parents have gone to bed, the time shifted use of communal space is common for the Elaine's age group according to Munro and Madigan (1999). Matthews et al. (1999) state that the bedroom is a key site for socialising for teenage girls as it is regarded as

a safe space whilst being somewhat private. Elaine expresses that she and her friends can chat in her room and she has all her 'stuff' in there. According to Griffiths and Gilly (2012) teenagers use possessions like clothes and photographs to personalise the space of the room and mark a boundary from the rest of the house. However at the end of this piece Elaine says she sometimes prefers to join the rest of her family outside her room because it can be a cold and she is bored of working on her homework. In addition, she feels she is missing out on events in the rest of the Maguire household. Elaine was one of the few interviewees who had her own room although her brother Bradley did too. Notably, Bradley and Elaine were the oldest children in the study so perhaps this accounts for why they had their own rooms.

## Gendered Spaces

This section will consider the subtheme of gendered spaces within the home. Seven families spoke about gender in relation to space use at home. Gender and space use is very tied to the roles that individuals carry out at home (Silverstone 1993; Pinho and Silva 2010). It is important to state that the excerpts explored and analysed under this theme appear to focus on constructed and co-constructed narratives between the adults or parents. The narratives explore important philosophical, cultural and religious influences on parenting gender and space. While the research is conducted in an Irish context, the research sought representative families of contemporary Ireland including families with very different cultural and religious backgrounds. This was a vital consideration in the pursuit of ethical research practice.

In the excerpt below Amina Arshad explains how she as a working mother knows where everything is kept in her house unlike her husband Nasir. Amina and Nasir live in the city and have two daughters Farah age six and Razia age four who go to school and crèche on weekdays. In response to my question 'How do organise your working day?' Amina says;

> *[Amina, Mum]Yeah, so I try to be organised ahead as much as I can ... my husband and I are completely different like he doesn't even know where things are at home, he couldn't care. (laughter)…….. I think they're all like that maybe. I think the men especially with the laundry and little girl's clothes it would be a mystery to him.*

*[KC] I see*

*[Amina] Oh my God!.. (laughter..) Like yesterday they were supposed to – like he was to dress them obviously and he would dress them in the strangest possible combinations, even pants under a skirt or (laughter)...... when the girls were younger and I was first back at work , I tried to be a perfectionist, their clothes should be perfect – but I don't mind that anymore ...*

*[KC] Yeah.*

*[Amina] And soon like they know themselves, oh no dad, you don't put this with this. Even the teachers and the Crèche girls, they know that today it's their dad who dressed them (laughter) so they know it's him so it's okay (laughter) they know they weren't dressed by a crazy woman.....*

This narrative is a segment of a much longer piece where Amina provides in depth details of all the activities that she undertakes in order to keep the household routines running smoothly. At the start of this segment she refers to the places within the house with which she is familiar but her husband Nasir is not. She illustrates this point by providing a picture of her husband's attempts to dress his daughters in Amina's absence. Later in the narrative sequence she refers back in time to when she first returned to work and how she has aspirations for the girl's clothes to look '*perfect*'. Quickly Amina orientates us back to the present again where she has accepted that this perfection is not possible with such a busy life and she seems pragmatic about it all. In the last few lines she again paints a picture to illustrate a point; this time the image is that of Farah and Razia going to crèche in odd clothes, dressed by their father she ponders what will the girls in the crèche think of her? From Amina's account we can catch a glimpse of some of her experiences of space use at home, there is a sense that she takes responsibility for knowing where everything belongs in the domestic sphere even though she works full time outside of home. There is little research done in the area of feminist geography with regards to mothers in the home although Tiver's (1985) work is one exception, a study which aimed give women at home in caring roles more voice and visibility in research on women's working lives. According to authors such as Hochschild (1989,1997) and Holloway (1999) juggling the burden of organising the house and childcare along with providing an income still falls disproportionately on women. According to

Jamieson (1998:488) 'Parenting is rarely a gender neutral activity and often exacerbates inequalities, mothers typically remain much more emotionally and practically involved with their children than fathers'. Amina Arshad appears from her story to be the one in her family who struggles to manage the private world of home with the public world of work and school.

The following excerpt is jointly constructed by a married couple, Abdul and Sabrina Ahmed who live with their two sons, Halim age seventeen and Hanif age nine. Sabrina's adult sister Cala also lives in the family home. The family is originally from Pakistan but the family have lived in Ireland for more than ten years. In this excerpt Sabrina says,

> *[Sabrina, Mum] I stay here in the house, I am depending totally on my husband I am carefree.*

> *[Abdul, Dad] I have to provide for my wife and children even if I have to borrow from outside I have to provide I am responsible. We don't like ladies working, if my wife is working outside the house, the children will suffer. I don't like it, for example if my wife earns money for the next fifteen or twenty years and I earn money where does that money go? In the end we die that money is not yours . The life suffers in that situation, your family is suffering for example if she is working when she comes home and it is what is going on with the children? Where is the food? I came home tired where is the food? the family are tired and are fighting with each other……….In Islam mainly earning money and related matters are meant to be fulfilled by the men, husbands, fathers brothers and the women has to take care of home care and child care.*

> *[Sabrina] my husband he is a very good man he is polite and he is good and I didn't work outside the home, and we are married nearly 25 years, he didn't shout at me any time…………….Islam says a woman is like a diamond woman it is like a diamond…. Not a stone in the road.*

> *[Abdul] you see a stone is a thing that everyone can touch, you know a stone in the road, but where are diamonds kept? In a very special place. If I own a diamond I must take care of it. I keep it safe at home.*

This piece gives an insight into the roles and values that are shared by Sabrina and Abdul. The couple seem to share a common code of understanding about their roles within the family and they jointly construct a story together (Kohler Riessman 2008). Narratives like Sabrina and Abduls can be a form of social code assuming that these codes are created between people according to Bakhtin (1981). In addition to this point, Fiese (2006) suggests that families create codes that regulate the individuals within the group, an example of this regulation is when Sabrina says she depends totally on her husband and therefore she is 'carefree', yet she is the main carer for the family. Abdul comments on his wife's account agreeing that it is he who is the breadwinner and he who is 'responsible'. He seems not consider Sabrina is responsible in the private space of the home. Belk et al (2009) argue that home and spaces that women inhabit are encoded differently by men and women; responsibility in the home is not valued as much as responsibility in the public sphere. The narrative sequence closes with the couple both using the same metaphor, that a woman is like a diamond, a parable that they both seem very familiar with as Abdul picks up exactly where Sabrina ends her sentence. This metaphor seems to work as a type of evaluation of their roles at home, Abdul in the public sphere as the breadwinner and Sabrina kept safe at home.

Roles are not all as clearly demarcated as within the Ahmed family. Joseph Barrett, a married father of two daughters aged five and seven talks about his and his partner's roles in the family. Joseph is very involved in his daughters' care but still feels that his role is different to his wife Agnes's role.

> 'The biggest thing for me would be in terms of the gender roles, we would have broadly traditional gender roles in so far as Agnes does the very much the indoor work and I would do the outdoor work.'

In contrast Ursula Hanlon, a mum of four feels that her husband does as much around the home as her and feels that their roles overlap.

> ' ... but I have to add like that I think Bill is very different to other husband's, he does all the grocery shopping here and puts on the washes just as much as I do and it's a very equal.  And he's really comfy.  And he's really comfy.'

Ursula speaks with conviction to say that her husband does as much care-giving at home as her, she also affectionately refers to him in a very warm manner as being *'very comfy'* as if he is tangibly easy-going. Bill has lost his job recently and is spending more time at home, renovating their house and spending time with Ursula and their daughters. However, Bill Hanlon emphasises that his home gym in his garage is important to him.

> *'Yeah and there's space that you can escape to. I've been doing the weight training since I was very young so, about twelve I suppose myself, so I've built up things over the years so I've a good selection of different bicycles, lifters and gliders and benches, boxing bags.'*

The fathers and children spoke about finding and maintaining 'personal space' in various forms, as 'dens' 'mancaves' and workshops'. The mothers in the families did not indicate that they occupied any particular personal spaces within the home.

Gendered space in the home is represented by many modern men who like to inhabit a 'mancave' or 'mantuary' a den or place to escape the hurly burly of family time. Four of the men interviewed described a personal place that they considered a retreat within the home. Similar to the den or garage space for some of the children who were interviewed the garden shed has long been a sanctuary for men to relax and occupy themselves within the domain of the household. This space has become even more significant for Bill since his redundancy, as it is a private space within the home for him to use his time and plan for the future, especially now that the space of the workplace is no longer available to him.

Similarly Joseph Barrett expresses that he appreciates a little space to himself,

> *I really enjoy heading down to my workshop at the back our big shed and tinkering away at some projects I have on the go, there is nothing in the shed that interests Agnes and the girls so they just leave me to my work and I have some quiet time.*

These contrasting narratives indicate how gender and space can be negotiated in homes. Gender also has a role to play outside the home in public spaces. Gorman-Murray (2011:1) in a recent study looked at men who have recently lost their jobs and he examined how 'feelings of belonging denote everyday emotional attachments

to place' in the context of work and he goes on to say that while 'gendered dimensions of belonging have received scholarly attention this has concentrated on women's experiences'. Gorman-Murray (2011:1) continues by saying that after redundancy the situation for many men prompts 'less investment in work as a site of self-worth, and increased attachment to home as a place of emotional well-being'. Arguably, Bill has to forge a new identity for himself with his changed circumstances, Kohler Riessman (2008) proposes that identities are constructed and reconstructed by the telling of stories, such as the one that Bill tells about his home gym. Gendered spaces are not absolute categories they are subject to change and are negotiated between the members in each family, while at the same time drawing on wider cultural norms, Spain (1992:28-29) describes this phenomenon by saying that:

> Gendered spaces themselves shape, and are shaped by daily activities. Once in place, they become taken, unexamined and seemingly immutable. What is becomes what ought to be which contributes to the maintenance of prevailing status differences.

The meaning of home and the spaces used by each gender in the home is unique to each family, notably each of the families who participated in this study gave very different responses to the subject of gender and spaces (Douglas 1991). Home is often assumed to be a site of leisure and relaxation in opposition to the world of outside work and pressure and responsibilities, this is not so for many people especially women (Valentine 2001).

## Space of the family car

The business of parenting is not confined to the home; therefore it is relevant to consider the 'car' as an extension of the home. Frequently families spend a considerable amount of time in the car, on the way to school or to and from the child-minders. Shared time spent together in the car can be an opportunity for conversation and reconnection after a busy day. For teenagers this might be some of the few times of enforced togetherness.

Driving involves some key elements for the family, namely the use of the space of the car and also the enforced time spent together. There is an inevitable proximity of family members inside the vehicle though the time spent can be enriching and

insightful. Eleven of the twelve families interviewed referred to time spent together in the family car. Urry (1995) argues that much social and psychological research has not regarded space use by families including the space occupied while travelling. It has instead been viewed as a container or shape for social activity rather than a vital and dynamic force. In addition Urry (2007:120) explains that the seamlessness of car use makes it more attractive for families as compared to public transport which is more fragmented. He expresses that 'inhabiting the car be positively viewed, but also constraining car 'users' to live their lives in spatially stretched and time compressed ways.'. The car could be considered a container but the time spent inside the space is not impervious to external forces. Media such as the car radio can have impacts on the listeners, hearing the news for example, something that the Lawlor twins describe in this segment below, Mum Mandy speaks and explains that the girls have just started school. She says the car is a space to converse on the journey to and from school.

> *On the journey to school we always just chat, when they come home they talk, talk, talk the whole way home, saying exactly what's after happening all day and in the morning we are very quiet going to school aren't we? [Mandy Lawlor, Mum]*

Mandy's description of the car journey above highlights the way in which the car is utilised as a space to connect with family members. The twin girls age five describe what they do on journeys in the car, they hear the news on the way to school where one day there was a dramatic story on the air to which they refer to in their joint narrative below.

> *[KC]   What do you do when you are in the car, do you chat or do you listen to music or do you?*
>
> *[Ali, age five]  Listen to music. We watch the news.*
>
> *[Grace, age five] I can't remember when it was but we heard on the radio, on dad's radio we heard a man died in the pub.*
>
> *[KC]   Oh that's terrible.*
>
> *[Ali]    Shooted in the pub, now he is dead.*

It is not surprising that we are interconnected with the world from inside the privacy of the car. This becomes even more significant when children have direct access to technology (Livingstone 2009). Six of the families interviewed said they spent a great deal of time together in the car. The family vehicle almost becomes a travelling home with multiple functions. Mum of three children Martha Keyes who works as a relief teacher describes how she is so busy organising the children's activities that she uses the car as an extension of home.

> *[Martha, Mum] Well normally its do the homework in the car with the two of them to be honest. Yeah I've to wait for her. Because Thursday is our mad day, she had this drama class from four to five, Mairead has the same class is five to seven and Oisin has guitar six to seven…… it's all go……………………………We change our clothes and have our snack in Tesco and then we do our homework in the car outside drama. If I'm organised I even bring a flask of tea in the car. Donal my husband picks this one up and I pick him up because they are clashing.*

Martha explains that much of her time is connected to the comings and goings of being in the car. Here she outlines how there are time spaces between the times she collects and drops and how she makes use of these while waiting in the car. Martha explains that *'Thursday is our mad day'* and how she "even" brings a flask of tea sometimes, time seems pressured for Martha, juggling so many schedules (Baxter 2009). The story ends when Martha expresses that luckily, Dad, Donal can help out when schedules clash. Similar to the Keyes family the O'Brien family, Mum Jennifer and her three children spend a sizable proportion of their day in the car. The family live a thirty minute drive from work and school and the children are involved in several afterschool activities. In answer to my question, *do you spend much time in the car?* Amy answers first;

> *[Amy, age eight] Yeah, and like we nearly spend as much time in the car that we spend at home. Yeah. We'd nearly live in the car if we were able.*

> *[Adam, age eight]   We get audio CD books so we can listen to them in the car. You can imagine the story perfectly in your head when you are listening to the CD just like if you're on the island in Kempsky's Kingdom……… yeah, or if you're in the house with Marley or time travelling with Molly Moon.*

*Even when you've arrived at the place but you don't get out of the car (laughs).*

*[Jill, age twelve]  Yeah. That's what happens to us when we get home, we're just sitting in the car for maybe 10 minutes afterwards just listening to the end of the story.*

*[Amy]  Yeah, we're parked up and we're just in the car still, it's so funny.*

This story by the O'Brien children provides a great richness and depth; they describe how they pass the time in their car. Amy starts with the statement that the family spend almost as much time in the car as they do at home. Next, Adam, Amy's twin brother speaks, he adds a complicating action in that he remembers times in the car when the family listened to audio books, he goes on to describe how the listener is transported to the world of the characters in the books (Labov 1982). The narrative ends with humour as they three siblings jointly share the same memory of a time when the journey was over but the family sat in the car listening to the story. Bruner (1987:15) states that stories that we tell can structure perceptual experiences and can influence our memories. The telling and retelling of family stories can help build memories and increase a sense of shared identity and belonging (Yuval-Davies 2006:201). They also increase self -confidence and language competency in children (Engel 2005).

While the analysis documented above refers to the 'children's' perspective, it is vital also to include some analysis of the car space from a parent' perspective. While time spent in cars can be functional and enjoyable, time in the car can also cause friction and tension amongst members of the family. Annika Golden, Mum to Isla aged six and Milly aged three, shares her frustration with the time spent in the car in the narrative below.

*[Annika] I feel that spending time in the car is you know, it's a waste of time because you have to concentrate on driving and you don't get to have eye contact with each other so there's not that kind of connection, you know, you are not really able to reach out and you know comfort your child, or even you know give them a squeeze on the arm or whatever……. because they are constrained by the car seat.*

Annika describes how the layout of the car especially in regards to the child car seats creates an enforced separateness that the children find hard to understand, her tone is one of frustration and irritation at this situation she refers to time spent in the car as a 'waste of time'. Annika is a very involved parent who greatly facilitates secure attachment with her children, she values their close bonds and does not wish to have lack of contact with her child or be unavailable to meet their needs due to the constraints of the car (Bowlby 2008). Annika goes on to explain her case further;

> *[Annika] When we have a 20 minute journey to bring her to school, so of course you can try and do a little bit of chit chatting but you know it's quite a lot of traffic in the morning and as I said you have to concentrate on the driving so I don't feel that it's, I don't feel that it's quality time but of course you try to. I find when I collect her I don't want to bombard her with how was school? And what did you do and because she has been fed so much impressions, so I you know, but I tend not to maybe have the radio on, but just you know you can leave it open, if she wants to talk she can.*

Annika expresses that she has to concentrate on her driving while in the car and therefore she cannot experience the emotional connection with her daughter Isla in the way she would like. She thoughtfully expresses how she is conscious that on the return journey she is careful not to 'bombard' Isla with questions but instead tries to leave space for Isla to talk. From Annika's narrative about the car we can again insight into her mothering philosophy, Annika is very focused on Isla's needs. Giddens (1992:98) talks about the quality of child-parent relationships which is very important to many parents, 'with a stress upon intimacy replacing that of parental authoritativeness. Sensitivity and understanding are asked on both sides'. We can see that Annika is very sensitive to Isla and her language displays a great of empathy towards her daughter.

In the next piece of narrative the O'Brien twins age eight and their older sister Jill aged twelve discuss the differences in travelling in her Mum's car and Dad's car. Mum, Jennifer initiates the narrative providing some contextual information about how much time the family spend in the car.

> *[Jennifer, Mum]      ... and for Jill, Adam and Amy they probably maybe spend more time in the car because at the weekends they would travel with*

*their dad because their father doesn't live here so that might entail travelling up to Wicklow or ...*

*[KC]   Yeah.*

*[Jennifer]      ... it's only an hour away though, don't worry (laughs). Or I'd travel up as well so they do spend a lot of time in the cars but their experiences in the different cars would be very different ...*

*[Amy, age eight] so we would be – daddy has soft material that kind of would soak up wet and everything but it would still be wet and mammy has leather seats and they don't soak up the wet at all and they're always like freezing cold or they're boiling hot……………and…… you know ..Mum loves to listen to audio books with us in the car or chat too.*

*[KC] And when you went with your dad do you listen to the audio books?*

*[Jill and Amy together] No. He doesn't believe in stuff like that. He believes in music. Red Hot Chilli Peppers, the radio….*

*[Adam, age eight] It's very annoying when he sings along (laughter). He always has loads of stuff in the in the back and when you open the door to get out of Dad's car all this stuff, like 'Auto -Trader' or invoices fall out (laughter).*

Even space in the car can have personal aspect, depending on the car's owner and occupation or even gender. Their Dad likes listening to music and his car is used for work, while Mum she listens to audio books and chats sometimes. This keen observation in this short section of narrative by the O'Brien children points to how the smallest details within the space of the car can be absorbed by children.  The quality of the experience of travelling with Mum or Dad can have a different feel for the family members, as if the car is connected to its owner. The above exploration of the 'car space' contributes further to the experiences of the O'Brien children in relation to space use between and across parents.

## Technology and family space

Space use in the home, and by extension the car, is influenced by the presence of various technologies, such as the television, laptop computers and games consoles (Spiegel 1992; Silverstone 1993, 1994; Ventura 1995; Daly 1996; Van Rompaey and Roe 2001; *Growing Up In Ireland Survey* 2009). Eleven out of the twelve families interviewed referred to using technology especially television in regards to spending time together. Watching television together in the family home is a very common activity according to the *Growing up in Ireland Survey* (2009). Some commentators such as Spiegel (1992) consider that television is the glue in family life, that families congregate around the television set to enjoy favourite programmes together. Although, conversely there has been a shift from communal television to more individualised patterns of consumption of television, what Livingstone (2009: 21) describes as a 'screen rich bedroom culture'. Statistics from the *Growing up in Ireland* (2009) survey support this statement, saying that 45 per cent of nine year olds had a television in their room. This links back to the theme of parenting values and philosophy where some families expressed the importance of regulating their children's television watching.

In the context of the current research and in honouring the variety of family experience the following narrative excerpt, the Barrett family parents, Agnes and Joseph give their views on the place of television in their family life.

> *[Agnes, Mum] they do have the television and they watch a little bit but it's very much a particular time in the day when there's agreed programmes. And the girls aren't interested in any more than that because well with both of them they wouldn't have watched television till they were gone two………….. And we would have done that out of choice…….well choice and understanding about brain development and all of that, and how television effects brain development.*

> *[KC]   Yeah.*

> *[Agnes]       So it was very much a conscious choice and I can see the impact of that in the girls now, in that they are actually not that particularly interested in the television.. Yeah it's not a big feature, it's something that*

*maybe in the winter when it's very wet and we are here a lot during the day, at lunch time for half an hour we put it on and that just gives us all a little bit of time on our own, because I eat my lunch then and the girls maybe watch the television for half an hour.*

*[Joseph, Dad] It's you know we have the programmes that they watch and that's what they watch and then the television goes off. So you would never come in and just find it on and nobody watching it.*

*[Agnes] And agreed purpose and a period of time. That would be a value for my family as well and Joseph's, we won't have a television in the kitchen, I don't want a television in the kitchen. Nor the bedrooms. I would be adamant against that, I think that's a really bad idea…………………*

*I also think though it makes television a centre of their life if it's in their room and there's control over it and it's isolating, because you are going off to watch your own stuff. Everybody is separate from one another.*

Within the Barrett household there was a clear wish to explain a demarcation of space use, the television has its place and its place is not the kitchen. According to Spiegel (1992) in the last few decades the television has become the focal point of many family living rooms like a fireplace. From the joint narrative of Joseph and Agnes we can sense that they do not agree with this sentiment and that for them television viewing has to be moderated and monitored. Bronfenbrenner (2000) states that television watching, particularly for children can be a passive activity and as such can be a negative factor in family interaction. In the excerpt above Agnes' remarks seem to echo this argument, she explains how she feels that television needs to have a certain defined function rather than being a very passive activity, in her house she describes it thus '*you would never come in and just find it on and nobody watching it*' This is however in contradiction to the prevailing statistics in Ireland on television viewing, 'watching TV is an almost universal activity among nine year olds, only 2per cent were reported by their mothers as not watching TV on a typical week night' (*Growing up in Ireland survey* 2009: 21). The current findings regarding these kinds of decisions in families give a greater insight into particular family practices. This is important to reiterate in the hope that the family that the family will choose according to their own family needs.

The Maguire family expressed that they enjoy watching television together and often they select favourite programmes to watch together. This was for many of the families interviewed a routine practice, nine of the twelve families expressed that they watched television programmes together regularly.

> *[Elaine age fifteen]    Yeah, we love X Factor and Coronation Street and then I'm a Celebrity is on at the moment so we never miss that.*

> *[Harriet, Mum] Yeah we are totally into reality TV here, we love them all, Big Brother especially even James (husband) loves it.*

Although in the next segment, Harriet Mum in the Maguire family expresses a cautionary note.

> *[Harriet, Mum] By choice we don't have Sky, we only have six channels, isn't that all we have?*

> *[Bradley, age seventeen] Nine or Eight.*

> *[Harriet] Eight have we?..... okay we don't have that many in comparison to you know the Sky households, by choice because of having the two students in the house and they would all be watching everything that's on, we only have the television in the living room and the smaller one in the kitchen……*
> *I think everyone just gets fragmented here and there all over the house when there are multiple televisions in different rooms.*

> *[Bradley] I'd love a telly in my room though, no one else wants to watch motorbikes.*

From her choice of language in this narrative we can appreciate that Harriet is cautious about having multiple televisions in the house, as she believes it just serves to fragment the family. Harriet does not consider her family '*a Sky household'*. According to Quinn (2010) many modern homes have become segregated into discrete areas, where one person is on the laptop in one room and someone is watching television in another room segregating the family. Bradley, Harriet's son contests his mother's views somewhat by saying at the end of the piece that he would love his own television because no one in the family wants to watch his choice of programmes. Is it clear that Bradley has engaged with what Harriet is

saying and he makes his views known, however Harriet doesn't comment further and the narrative is left unfinished. From an analysis perspective it is fair to state that the narrative needs to remain open and unfinished given that the language of choice is so pertinent for both mother and son.

Lastly, there is a need to reconsider the concept of fragmentation of family space as a result of private television watching. In answer to my question, *do you watch TV much as a family?* Sharon Walsh single Mum to Jeff age nine answers;

> *[Sharon, Mum] yeah we do that together. Yeah, yeah we do ..... I watch his cartoons with him and then…….pause*………. I'll say like… okay now I want to watch something so you're going to watch with me and if you ask him it's always like come on we have to find something that we both can watch, ………………pause*...we both try and find something good and if there's nothing that we can find and I'll let him watch his thing for a while and then if he does want to watch it he has his own Sky box in his room ...*

> *[KC]   Yeah.*

> *[Sharon]       ... so he'll go up and he got a big TV for Christmas, no, for his birthday last year so he'll go up to his room and watch the end of his programmes ...*

> *[KC]   Yeah.*

> *[Sharon]       ... but I'm very conscious not to make it that I'm downstairs watching TV and he's upstairs watching TV ...*

> *       ... we don't want that so he's saying oh I'd really like to watch Hell Boy for example ...*

> *[KC]   Yeah.*

> *[Sharon]… now I 'll be thinking to myself I really don't want to watch Hell Boy but I really don't want him upstairs watching Hell Boy and me downstairs watching something so ...we compromise when we can.*

In this excerpt Sharon begins by answering the question directly, saying 'yeah' that she and Jeff watch cartoons together. Next there is a pause and a complicating action

is introduced to the narrative, a negotiation over whose choice of programmes is watched (Labov 1972; Kohler Riessman 2008). Sharon expresses that after a period where she has watched Jeff's choice of cartoons, she now asserts that she wants to watch something she is interested in. Sharon goes on to explain that if we can't find something 'good' to agree on then Jeff will go to his room as '*he has his own 'Sky box'* there. After a short description of where Jeff's television came from Sharon gives the listener an evaluation of this situation, explaining that she is conscious that she and Jeff are in separate areas of the house both watching television, she finished her narrative with a vivid image of Jeff aged nine watching the film 'Hell Boy' alone in his room while she watches something else downstairs. Van Rompaey and Roe (2001:352) call this separation the 'compartmentalization of family life'. Sharon's brief account is very insightful and gives the listener a glimpse into the lived experience of Jeff and Sharon and the choices and compromises they make in relation to technology in their busy lives.

Clearly, for the Walsh family the use of technology, in particular the television does have an impact on the space use and time spent together at home. The 'threat' of compartmentalisation and fragmentation of the Walsh family in particular is very significant given that Sharon and Jeff are the unit. Therefore, compromise is more important to the maintenance not only of shared physical space but also psychological space and continued connectedness. This relatively short exploration of the impact of technology on family life serves to bring to fore the role of such in the lives of parents and children in family contexts. While all families interviewed were impacted upon, the analysis here of the Barrett, Maguire and Walsh families highlight the processes of communication and negotiation engaged in by families on a daily basis in the context of the role and function of technology in their family lives.


## Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore with families their stories of everyday life in modern Ireland with specific regard to what kind of time, space and activities families share together and how this links to the family's identity. This chapter focussed on the findings related to space use at home and how this links to a family's

experience of time spent together. This analysis of domestic spaces with families living in Ireland points to a number of important aspects related to the lived experience of family members. Firstly, it highlights the importance of material space to concepts of family identity and belonging. Christensen et al. (2000:153) point out that the space of 'home' is not a static concept but one that is dynamic and constantly changing with the movement of children and adults in and out of the home going about their daily activities. According to Christensen et al. (2000), family identities are however bound up with a sense of belonging in the sharing and negotiation of home spaces, this was a key finding in this research.

Home is a physical space as Cieraad (2002) points out, the shape size and layout of our homes affects our space use and our relationships within the home, open plan kitchens mean we are more in contact with other family members while the domestic work is carried out. Sharing bedrooms among siblings can increase emotional connectedness within relationships but can also cause conflict. Space use is linked to underlying values around child-rearing practices such as allowing children freedom in the outdoors, or sanctioning televisions in children's rooms. What emerged very strongly from this research with families was a sense of deep connectedness between parents and children akin to what Giddens (1992) terms a transformation of intimacy. This phenomenon was evidenced in the family interviews.

Secondly the research into families uncovered that through dynamic processes of contested space use, and the idea of family constructed by the individuals within it and reshaped continually by parents and children through on-going negotiation (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Children can assert their ownership over particular spaces as was illustrated by children in this study creating boundaries in their dens and special places (Christensen et al. 2000). Furthermore, the children in this research were highly articulate about the meanings associated with the spaces and places that they frequented; they exhibited a great degree of personal agency in their responses (James 1990; Mayall 2002; Corsaro 2005). James (1990) poses the question is there a place for children in geography? From the voices of the children in this study it is clear that children do not only have a voice, but also a place. This addresses James (1990) question of the location of children in geography.

Thirdly, this study illuminates the importance of time and space as linked entities when considering meaning making within family stories. The narratives that families tell cast back and forth within time from memories of past holidays and celebrations to aspirations for the future and yet pivotally all these accounts are spatially rooted; most often at home but occasionally home from home, holidays, visits to relatives or even in the extension of home in the car. Christensen et al. (2000: 154) proposes that space use at home could be conceived of as 'a contestation which takes place in and over time. In this sense 'home' and 'belonging' are temporally as well as spatially enacted.' But the car, den and outdoor spaces also feature in the social psychological geography of the families activities. The significance of exploring space in this research lies in the connection between space and family routines and rituals. The experience and enactment of family lives in spaces stresses even more the interconnectedness of these themes within the tapestry of family lives in contemporary Ireland.

In terms of methodology the family interview proved to be an excellent tool in expediting lengthy and richly detailed data relating to family space sharing from the participants involved. Often the children whilst being interviewed 'walked' me through areas where they liked to play to dens and cubbies outside the home and also into their own spaces such as playrooms.

The three analysis and discussion chapters narratively analysed and discussed the dominant themes in this research, that of family routines, family rituals and family spaces. These themes overlap and impact upon one another. They are all invariably linked and will be illustrated visually overleaf using the bioecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1993).

**Analysis based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model**

**Chronosystem**
**Routines:** Change and develop over time in the family as the children age
**Rituals:** Change in family structure over time changes nature of rituals
**Spaces:** Changes in space use over time. Couples might downsize when children leave family home.

**Macrosystem:**
**Routines:** pressures on family time by culturally prescribed roles
**Rituals:** Families draw on customs and traditions in their culture
**Spaces:** Current trends-smaller families bigger homes.

**Exosystem**
**Routines:** Work patterns of demands of school affect family routines
**Rituals:** are celebrated with extended family and friends
**Spaces:** Neighbourhood safety influences play space for children

Chronosystem

Macrosystem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Child
Parent

**Microsystem**
**Routines:** Circadian rhythms of children affect routines, often dictated by ages and needs of children.
**Rituals:** Mostly based around the developmental stages of children e.g. Christenings, birthday parties.
**Spaces:** Close space sharing with family, sharing bedrooms, physical closeness.

**Individual level**
**Developing Child/ Parent**

**Mesosystem**
**Routines:** positive experience of routines leads to family stability.

**Rituals:** help create positive family identity and sense of belonging

**Spaces:** Family members learn to negotiate their living space in the home.

*Figure 20*

# Chapter 9 Conclusion

## Introduction

This research consisted of an exploration of family life with twelve participating family units residing in Ireland who had one or more children. The family interviews conducted within this research elucidated over twenty themes relating to how families spend their time together. Our understanding of family life can be a rather taken for granted concept so it is very pertinent to study families from the inside, that is to say from the point of view of all the family members together. The research uncovered family stories relating to the meanings of family routines, rituals and spaces. These were deemed the most dominant and interesting themes found within the scope of the research.

Before embarking on a summary of the key findings it is important to reiterate the nature of family change in Ireland before engaging with a review of the research aims and overarching research questions within this PhD study. This concluding chapter will outline the three key premises in the research.

Families have changed in Ireland in the last few decades, to more diverse structures inclusive of blended families, lone parents with children and more separated and divorced families (Central Statistics Office 2012; Fahey and Lunn et al. 2012). However, the dominant form of family structure is still the traditional family unit headed by a husband and wife while the next most common family unit with children was a lone mother and her child/children (Central Statistics Office, 2012). There are many societal changes that have influenced families in Ireland in the recent past, not least the relatively recent divorce legislation in Ireland and the Children Referendum (2012). However, there are many consistencies despite family changes, with most parents reporting that they are happy to be parents, and most children in the country reporting that they are happy with their lives (*Growing Up in Ireland* 2012). In relation to labour market participation, the patterns of employment for parents have changed in the last two decades. In 2000 half of all couples with children were dual earners (Russell et. al 2004). From the analysis also of the sociology of childhood, children have increased rights to be heard and treated as

individuals (Greene and Hogan 2005; James 2009; James and James 2008; Mayall 2010; Westcott and Littleton 2005) and this is important to the pursuit of research into family and children's lives.

The current research sought to include all types of families in order to give voice to all types of family stories whatever their structure and context. The narratives from the families in this research point to the fact that despite the separation of parents, relationships endure albeit of a different quality and with them unique family routines and rituals emerge. Four of the families who participated in the study were either lone or separated parents and these families spoke with equal commitment to more traditional family types of cherishing special moments with their children and creating memories with them. The parents and children who took part in this study spoke with great conviction about many happy times spent in each other's company. They described moments of closeness, nurturance and intimacy that mirror the ideas of the 'pure relationship' put forward by Giddens (1992). These intimate connections also highlighted what Smart (2007) called personal autonomy in the relationships within families. The personal autonomy and agency of the child participants has been aptly demonstrated within families through explorations within the analysis chapters.

## Research question and aims

Before the final analysis and discussion of the significant themes it is useful to journey back to the beginning of this research and connect with the aims as set out in the introductory chapter. This discussion will outline the three key premises in the research. The chapter will then consider the unique contributions this study will make to the research area. Following this the strengths and limitations of the research will be considered. Suggestions for future directions in the research area will also be discussed.

The main aim of this study was to explore with families in modern Ireland their everyday life experiences as told through family stories during family interviews.. The principle questions in the research focused on what kind of time, space and activities families share together? An additional aim was to examine the impact of busy lives on modern families and to consider whether the fast pace of modern living

effects the time that family has to spend together. Time is spent in particular ways in family settings, this research set out to explore family routines and rituals and how these shape family practices and experiences and in particular how these practices maintain family identity. Time in the family is often spent at home and exploration of shared family spaces was another key research aim. A final objective in this research was to elucidate children's experiences of their lives within the context of their family, and to explore how children view their homes and play spaces.

## Summary of key findings

### Three key premises underpinning the research

This research was underpinned by three key premises. The first premise in the research was that meanings between family members are socially constructed and part of an on-going process of revision and renegotiation (Bruner 1990; Burr 2003; Gergen 2009). This research used an epistemological perspective that is inherently interpretivist in nature with an emphasis on the exploration of shared social meanings as understood by the families in the study. In addition it was considered that the best way to fulfil the aims of this study and uncover the complex meaning between family members would be to narratively analyse the family interviews using the model proposed by Kohler Riessman (1993a; 2008).

The second premise of this research has been to consider children and their families as located within a specific social and physical environment as well as historical time (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). The main themes explored with the families included routines, rituals and spaces. These themes can be understood as interrelated and profoundly influenced by both local and broader social networks, and factors that change over time (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1993).

The third key premise of this research was a focus on child agency. In tandem with a paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of developmental processes, there has been a surge in interest in the fields of sociology, psychology and social policy to include and acknowledge children's right to be considered persons rather than people on the way to becoming adults (Greene and Hogan 2005). Children are regarded throughout this study as competent social actors, capable of participating in research and who

are facilitated by the research methodology to express their views on their own experiences within families.

## Findings from CAQDAS NVivo 9 analysis

In essence there have been fundamental shifts in the structure of families in Ireland, especially in relation to work patterns, legislation and attitudes to families and parenting. However much still remains the same within families. From the responses from the families in this research, the Mums, Dads and children all spoke about the time they enjoyed together and their desire to have fun and share good times. From the first analysis phase where the family interviews were coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programme NVivo 9, twenty key themes emerged in relation to spending time together as a family. A great variety of topics were spoken about by the respondents and there were many themes common to all the families, such as *time together*, *family routines*, *leisure activities*, *family rituals and celebrations* and *work-life balance. Family routines* was a very dominant theme in the initial coding of the interviews, this theme linked quite closely with work-life balance. Families referred to the way time is structured in their everyday lives by routine activities driven by work and school amongst other demands. Housework was mentioned as a key aspect of family routines, this was mostly spoken about by parents rather than the children. *Family rituals* was another very strong theme in the analysis of the family interviews. Rituals refer to the particular practices in the family around celebrations or even a small everyday practice that has some shared symbolic meaning for the family. Rituals were spoken about by all of the twelve families, however from the subsequent narrative analysis it was evident that family rituals are unique to each family. The families explained how they had particular traditions in their family, for example how a child may celebrate a birthday or how Christmas is celebrated, for example who decorates the tree. Or maybe who makes the breakfast at the weekend or carves the Sunday roast.

Some themes were spoken about almost exclusively by adults such as *work life balance, parenting values, family relationships, gender, changing Ireland* and *aspirations for the future. Family Spaces* referred to space use at home and emerged as a highly significant part of the family interviews. Children and adults alike spoke extensively about sharing spaces whether at home or in the garden. The space of the

home is central to the family, whether the family lives in a permanent home or is in temporary accommodation before moving to another house and as such it was thought to be very pertinent to an analysis of family time. The families spoke about sharing bedrooms and described details of their family life such as where they ate their meals or where children liked to play. Parents and children explained that there could be conflict over space use, such as quarrels over the 'best' place on the sofa, or the most comfortable space around the table. Outside space featured a great deal in the interview responses, the children engaged very well with this topic and provided thoughtful insights into how and where they chose to play in their local environment. Parents added to their children's accounts by explaining how far they would allow the children to venture from the house and garden. This differed depending on the ages of the children. Adolescents in this study described that they spent time sharing space at home with other family members, but also spent most of their leisure time in their bedrooms, especially if they had friends visiting. *Gender* and *spaces* at home were two themes that interlinked, for example the mothers in the study expressed that they spent a lot of their time at home in the kitchen, whereas the fathers described that they spent more time in the living room or in the garage or workshop.

The themes of *play, pets and friends* were spoken about predominately by the children in the families. Play was very closely linked to the theme of *spaces.* Children described a large range of play activities from indoor hobbies, jigsaws, trains, art and craft activities to technology based play. They also described outdoor activities like cycling or playing on the trampoline or football. 'Dens, 'cubbies' and other special places were outlined in great detail by many of the children and this provided very rich data. Pets were a topic that children loved to speak about at length during the interviews. Talking about their dog or cat or guinea pig proved to be a great way to ease children into speaking in the interviews, especially if they were a little shy. This is a theme that reinforces findings in the State of the Nation's Children (2010) study about the importance of pets in family life. It was clear from the interviews that owning a pet was enormously important for many children, it was the source of many humorous stories that the children told.

The theme of *school* was explored by both parents and children. *Technology* was a popular topic and was discussed by all but one of the twelve families. Many families spoke of how they enjoyed spending time together watching favourite television

programmes like 'X Factor' or a football match, there seemed to be almost a ritual aspect to this regular shared time that marked out a Saturday evening providing a comforting predictability to the week. However, not all the families interviewed owned a television but the majority did. Use of laptops and gaming consoles featured very widely in how individual family members spent their time especially if there were older children in the families. Many of the interviewees expressed that with adolescents and adults on smart phones and laptops connected to the internet this could disrupt the sense of togetherness, so that family members were physically proximal to each other while communicating with someone very physically distant.

*Driving* in the car was a theme that generated a wealth of interesting conversations from the families. All twelve of the families expressed that their lives felt 'busy' juggling work, school, childcare and after school activities and appointments. Much of this time together is spent in the car and this is a space that is often overlooked in terms of family togetherness, two of the twelve families explained that they felt frustrated when travelling in the car with their children as they felt they could not communicate with the children and meet their needs while driving. Whereas some families with older children expressed that travelling in the car together offered an opportunity to discuss sensitive or contentious topics and as such was a positive experience.

Overall, the themes that were spoken about by the families were moderated by the ages of the children in the family. Families with younger children tended to have different types of family routines as compared to families with school-going children. It is clear from the findings in this research that there are many universal features common to all families especially in regard to spending time together. All twelve families, both parents and children expressed a wish to spend more time together. Although, this desire was more particularly a wish to spend more time together at leisure rather than more mundane family activities such as housework.

**Findings from narrative analysis phase**

As discussed in the above section the findings from the first phase of the analysis, using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programme NVivo 9 provided a wealth of wide ranging data. Through the second phase; the narrative analysis phase, close attention was paid to the family stories within the data. This

detailed in-depth analysis was concentrated on three key themes, family routines, family rituals and family space use. This method of analysis allowed for the conversational circle in the family stories to be uncovered. It took careful peeling back of layers of family conversation to discover very meaningful fragments of conversation. Small details of family life emerge from these family stories which shed light not just on themes in the stories but the multiple perspectives within the family group. The use of narrative analysis in the study of family stories means line by line analysis of the text, this allows for the relationships between the individuals in the family to become apparent. Moments of interaction between children and parents or between siblings while telling a story are highlighted when such close attention is focused on the narrative.

Occasions where a parent supports or prompts a story from a child are captured. Frequently, gentle prodding is used by the parent to give the child the confidence to speak for him or herself, this I term **'Scaffolded Agency'**. This was evident in many of the family stories. Usually the child would speak hesitantly at first but eventually gaining confidence and really contributing to the story being told. At this point many of the most insightful comments were made. A parent may talk about a topic, for example, bedtime stories and this may spark a memory for a child to take the narrative in a different but very interesting direction. All of the families interviewed recalled tiny moments of intimacy such as caring for a sick child or enjoying time absorbed in a common interest, which gave a glimpse into a world where bonds of family and caring were highly valued.

This belongingness is also achieved by the creation of routines and rituals within a family, which helps to construct a place of common understanding and joint identity (Yuval-Davies 2006). The concept of belonging and togetherness seemed to be central to many accounts from the families. Whether it was very inconsequential mundane time together like travelling in the car or washing up it was the essential quality of togetherness that seemed to mark out the time as special. Each family has its own blueprint of its particular routines and rituals and how space is used to carve out a deeply unique and personal identity that is qualitatively different from other families. There was a very palpable sense with the families who participated in this research that they all understood the rules, obligations, routines and rituals in *their* family.

Routines and rituals draw on cultural codes. Over time the family creates its own codes. These codes serve to communicate the expectations around what is acceptable behaviour in the family, as Fiese (2006:126) points out 'the family code does not operate in isolation but is influenced by cultural codes as well as individual dispositions, a family can create a code that that regulates individual and group behaviour'. The participating families also talked about conflict, with references made to arguments and tussles and pressures on time on family relationships.

The stories of sharing space at home offered a window into how families negotiate moment by moment conversations regarding where activities are carried out at home and by whom. Families spoke about who gets to use the living room and when, and who spends most time in the bathroom. Every member of the family seems to have an opinion on negotiating space at home. Children told long and complex stories of their adventures in their special places. The children explained in minute detail the history of their 'dens' and why exactly they were so special. In order to highlight the importance of their narrative descriptions they frequently walked me through their play spaces describing all the while every important feature of their domains. In these moments they were animated and were fully competent social actors in their own worlds. This offers huge insight into the worlds of children's stories, how significant they are to the narrators and researchers alike. The children and their families wove their stories of times in the past and times they hoped to have in the future.  In sum, there are many common features between families about how they spend time together but many differences also. Each family in this study was distinct, having its own shared understandings and sense of identity and yet sharing with other families a desire to spend more time enjoying each other's company.

In summary, the meaning of family time is defined by the family members, this is a very pertinent finding and adds to debates and discourse regarding family breakdown. Life in modern families in Ireland feels very busy with multiple schedules being 'juggled' according to the families who participated in this research.. However, little moments of emotional intimacy are ever present and important in maintaining family bonds. Time spent together in unexpected moments such as while doing housework or travelling in the car can be vital in sustaining closeness and emotional well-being. Sometimes simultaneous free time is hard to find in families but is highly sought and valued by parents and children alike.

Families often navigate through very busy schedules, constantly adjusting them in order to create the most harmony and simultaneous free time.

## Original contributions to the research area

### 1. A methodology where families were interviewed simultaneously

This study looked at families from the inside and considered whole families and children as active agents, adding to the rich and unique tapestry that makes up families. The interview was carried out with everyone together rather than sequentially, child then adult.

There has been some broadly similar work in the area of family research most notably, the on-going National Longitudinal survey, *Growing Up in Ireland* (2009-to date), looking at the lives of two cohorts, 3 month old infants and 9 year old children. In relation to the qualitative component of the *Growing up in Ireland* study Harris et al. (2011), published comparable themes such as family activities, however children and their parents were interviewed separately from each other whereby the research design required that the children did not overhear their parents' responses. The resulting data from the aforementioned research was thematically but not narratively analysed.  The most important part of the PhD research I carried out with families in an Irish context was the passionate commitment to the entire family being interviewed together in a conversational circle in order to discover the complex and layered meanings inherent in family processes. This research took as key the underlying principle that identities are negotiated within a common space of meaning (Kohler Riessman 1993a; 2008; Phoenix 2008; Salmon and Kohler Riessman 2008).

There is a tension according to some researchers who believe that individual agency is not important within co-constructed narrative. This research conducted with families indicates that both social and co construction of meaning within narratives does not necessarily negate personal agency and in fact can promote the agency of children in families, especially in relation to their contribution to their family narratives (Engel 2005). It is apparent from these family narratives that personal agency and joint meaning making can co-exist. Families by their telling of their stories, often jointly, weave a richer tapestry of meaning than if one individual alone

told the story. Narrative methods work very effectively to gather information rich data supporting insight into the personal and private world of the family (Gabb, 2009; Kohler Riessman 2008). These types of family narratives have been rarely accessed and as such are an important source of information about how family processes can work especially in respect of family routines, rituals and space use. By utilising several open ended questions in the family interviews such as '*Tell me how you enjoy spending time together'* the participants could exercise an element of choice about what they focussed on in their response. Consequently, the power differential between the researcher and the researched is weighted more in favour of the participant. Arguably, this facilitates greater access to the innermost thoughts of the participants and also the understandings between family members. I believe that the narrative approach was effective in achieving the aims and objectives set out at the beginning of the study. My rationale in pursuing a narrative research approach was for three key reasons;

- To represent family narratives as whole stories, complex and multi-layered.
- To capture subjective experiences to give a glimpse into personal worlds of how families spend their time together.
- To focus upon the family members accounts, how they chose to tell their own stories, what aspects they emphasised and what parts they chose to omit.

## 2. Children's voices relating to domestic space use, family rituals, family routines and 'Scaffolded Agency'.

The children in this research along with their parents and siblings were asked about how they used space in their homes. They described through their narratives what special places in their home were important to them such as dens or cubbies. There is very little research conducted where children along with their families in a naturalistic setting narrated their stories together about home space use. There is a growing body of research into children's geographies (Aitken 1994; 2000; James 1990; Jones 2000; Valentine 2001, 2004). However, there is very limited research on domestic space use from a child's perspective. There is some research that focusses on adolescent's experience of space use at home by McNeish and Roberts (1995)

and Matthews et al. (1999), however this research did not span a wide age group of children. Suburban space use and sociability within public spaces has been researched by Corcoran at al. (2009), although this does not overtly focus on family space use. As discussed earlier in the chapter this research is premised on the idea that children's accounts are equally valuable to adults. In addition, that children were regarded as competent social actors Jenks (1996).

However, although this was a central principle of the research methodology, in practice through the family interviews it became apparent that children often required the emotional support of the parent when asked a question. The parent seemed to understand their child's need to be psychologically supported and encouraged to speak during the family interviews. This was a situation that arose in all of the family interviews especially with regard to younger children. There appeared to be a very natural and instinctual behaviour on the part of the parent to support their child to exercise his or her own agency. I called this phenomenon '**Scaffolded Agency'** as it seemed to draw on Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of scaffolding while at the same time a desire on the part of the parent to promote their child's agency. This I found both fascinating and touching. After the child was sufficiently scaffolded to speak freely, the child then engaged really well and offered lots of ideas and comments to the family story. There was a sense of attunement between parent and child when these situations arose, the parent seemed to sense what the child needed in that moment. This was perceptible within the family narratives and added a layer that was unique to that story and that family.

## 3. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model as a conceptual framework for the key themes for this research in an Irish context

This study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model to provide an analysis and connect the concepts of family routines, rituals and family spaces. These analyses within the current study highlight how family narratives of routines, rituals and space use are socially embedded within communities, society and culture. The study illustrates how family routines and rituals are impacted by forces beyond the family such as work and school and even the wider influences such as the economy. Findings herein also point to the fact that family routines, rituals and space use at home change and adapt over the life-course of the family and over time.

## Methodological observation and implications

Using the method of the family interview, although at times very challenging proved to be an excellent tool to reveal complex and in depth narratives from the family groups. Interviewing one to one could not have provided the breadth and depth of information that emerged from the families when interviewed together.

Many aspects of family life became apparent by using this method for example, the relationships within the family become visible through the telling of the story. Individuals in the family can make their views known and at the same time have them contested by another member of the family. It becomes clear who the most confident child is or who is the 'joker' in the group. Also, it becomes apparent who is the scapegoat for teasing. This is often Mum or Dad. Seemingly small little phrases and comments can add a wealth of meaning to a family story. Humour was often employed as a device for younger children to wrestle control of conversations that they (the children) felt were slipping away from them and in order to re-establish themselves back into conversations. Several of the younger children in the family narratives were very articulate and assertive and managed to express their views in a very engaging manner. Children often used humour to get the 'last word' in a story. The family narratives highlighted that family stories can be humorous and cement family identity and belongingness though joint remembering of special times such as holidays or ritual occasions. Memories from holidays or favourite pets that had died to neighbours who were unfriendly to embarrassing occasions for Mum and Dad were the subject of many family stories.

My choice of narrative analysis as justified in chapter four was the most appropriate way of accessing the family stories as it allowed for minute details to be revealed in the exchanges between family members. It allowed for nuanced aspects to conversations to be uncovered, analysed and appreciated. Through the narrative analysis carried out within this study the subtle aspects relating to family practices such as mealtime rituals and routines were revealed as core processes of family identity and belonging. This uncovering of family practices in great detail, contributes significantly to the study of families in an Irish context.

## Research implications

This research will add to socio political debates concerning the rights of children and 'work life balance' debates in Irish social and working society. It placed particular value on honouring the voices of children when expressing themselves about their family lives. In particular, the findings related to children's views on family space use, routines at rituals at home. These findings will extend and enhance our knowledge about children's lives and place them centre stage in policy debates around childhood in Ireland. This research is well positioned to inform debates regarding family practices such as family routines and rituals. In particular, the findings inform theory relating to issues of identity, belongingness and family well-being. A practical outcome of this would be the creation of a family well-being checklist concerned with family routines and rituals that could be used in family support and social care settings.

My choice of methodology, that of the family interview where entire families are interviewed as a discrete unit contributes a unique and pertinent research methodology to scholarship within family research. It allows each member of the family to express their views but within the dynamic context of the group. Furthermore, the use of narrative analysis to analyse the data that emerged from family interviews further advances our knowledge about highly complex processes and practices within families. This research methodology could be extended and adapted to great effect within family research in the future. In addition, this research presented an expansive amount of literature relating to families in Ireland which spanned several disciplines; sociology, developmental psychology and cultural geography to name a few. This interdisciplinary approach to the study of the family marks a significant contribution to the research field as it encompasses a wide range of perspectives from which to understand families in an Irish context.

## Limitations to the Study

Relatively small qualitative studies like this one have several limitations. In terms of generalisability the intention was not to generalise the findings to a wide population like a very large scale quantitative study on families (National Longitudinal survey,

*Growing Up in Ireland* 2009). It was anticipated at the outset that an in-depth study and exploration of a small sample of families in an Irish context would be the key outcome of the research. In particular the discovery of how these families spent their time together and the meaning families attached to that time was a core objective to undertaking this research. The demographic of the research was relatively narrow, not all family types from across all social divisions were represented despite many attempts to recruit volunteers.

While using narrative methods to elucidate narratives with young children, demand characteristics may occur (Parker 2003). Children may wish to please the adult who is interviewing them and give a response which they believe is expected of them. Narrative methods can be difficult to carry out and are very time consuming, as Daiute and Lightfoot (2004: vii) comment;

> Despite compelling arguments that a narrative approach will advance our understanding of individual development within sociohistorical contexts, the analysis of narratives often seems like a mysterious art to those who are new to narrative enquiry. Narrative analysis assumes a multitude of theoretical forms, unfolds in a variety of specific analytical practices, and is grounded in diverse disciplines.

For family researchers, research of this kind can be 'a blessing and a curse to consider the intricate inter correlations of family process variables' (Fiese 2006:126). The analysis of family narratives can be enormously time consuming, but very rewarding in terms of the level of analysis and detail pertaining to the experience of children and their families.

## Challenges within the research process

Getting in contact with and recruiting all types of families proved to be very challenging. Another challenge that arose with this study was the access to families, in particular, their availability at the same time for interview. Also, not all families that volunteered were suitable due to the ages of the children, especially if the children were under the age of four. This absence may have made for a different dynamic than if the father or other family member had been present.

There are other more practical aspects to consider when the focus of the research is centred on detailed analysis of conversations. When interviewing whole families it is essential to ensure that everyone sits close together in order to get the best quality of recording but also the best layering of co-construction of narrative, that is to say the best opportunity for each family member to add to and build up the story that they are focusing on. When working with children it is vital to 'warm them up' because they need a chance to get accustomed to the interviewing process, they need to be eased into the interview process slowly and made to feel at ease (Dunn 2005; Greenstein 2006; Daly 2007). All but one interview was carried out in the participant's home which was not without its challenges. Sometimes, there were delays beginning the interview while family members arrived to join in. Children could have noisy little 'tussles' every now and then which made it hard to concentrate on the interview. Sometimes the ambient noise of children in the background was distracting and ultimately made transcribing pretty difficult. In some of the interviews the television was on in the background. Occasionally there were phones ringing, visitors to the house, barking dogs and smoke alarms. However this is the reality of family life and experience and is intrinsic to families' everyday experience which I was keen to capture on digital voice recorder (Gabb 2008).

## Credibility and Validity

As researchers in the qualitative tradition we are enmeshed within the research context. As researchers we choose the scope of the project, the questions that are asked and how the analysis is carried out. The acknowledgement of our own subjectivities in the research process helps to increase the validity of the research (Kvale 1996). The decisions that are made of what to represent in the research process are ultimately decided by the researcher, this is a highly subjective process. As Etherington (2004) suggests, all research texts are incomplete and partial and the stories that are represented are negotiated by their narrators and interpreted subjectively by the researcher. In a similar vein, Kohler Riessman (1993:23) remarks in narrative research that 'the construction of the work bears the hallmark of the person who created it'. This has an impact upon the validity in the research so it is essential that this subjectivity is acknowledged. Choosing what to represent from the

research is also very personal, and it necessitates an honest appraisal of one's own position as Kohler Riessman (2005: 486) describes below:

> A narrative representation required that I place myself in dialogic situations and include my emotions, typically stripped from the social scientist's account. Making the backstage visible challenges the rules of much scholarly writing, including the monologism that characterises some narrative accounts.

Credibility can be ensured by being 'reflexive about how we bring meaning and focus to the research' (Daly 2007:255). The knowledge built up between family members is socially constructed, provisional and open to revision and interpretation. As discussed previously, the researcher is also involved in the construction of the narrative and furthermore chooses what to interpret and present. Therefore, it is vital to present the results of research in a truthful and transparent manner and personal reflexivity was an extremely important facet of this validity (Etherington 1994). What is necessary to focus on knowledge as a social construction rather than a mirror of reality (Daly 2007).

## Future research

This PhD. thesis is clearly positioned against previous research into the family. A wealth of data was produced from the family interviews regarding family routines, rituals and family space use. The data explored throughout serves to address significant omissions in the research landscape to date. As a topic the concept family is under researched (Fiese et al. 2001). In regards to the methods of how family is studied leading researcher Barbara Fiese (2006:125) states that

> Survey and descriptive studies suggest that the practices associated with family routines and effective investment in family routines hold promising prospects for generations to come. Yet the explicit ways in which routines and rituals may garner influence have not been addressed.

As was discussed in chapter six; the analysis and discussion, routines support health and family stability. Regular bedtimes can have a positive effect on children's behaviour and regular homework routines support academic achievement. Adolescents experience more of a sense of self efficacy when there are regular mealtimes and curfews. Arguably they are the cornerstone of family life. Further

research in this area would I believe be beneficial to family wellbeing in an Irish context. Similarly, further research into family ritual would add greatly to the sparse amount of academic literature in this area. Family rituals are very significant for families and need much greater exploration. Rituals help to construct meaning and identity within family life and as such are also significant indicators of family well-being (Yuval-Davies 2006). Furthermore, research is needed into the subjective accounts of children's space use at home especially in relation to spaces that are important to them, rather than enquiry into areas that we think are important to them (Aitken 1994). This would add to knowledge about children and their families in an Irish context.

Finally, this thesis explored how families spend time together, in the form of family stories. Families spoke of good times together and times of frustration and negotiation. This was told often with great humour and with vivid imagery. Many of their stories are not represented in this thesis due to the constraints of the word count. It is with regret that I leave them out, because they were so engaging and interesting despite what Gabb (2008) would say about family research as being messy, but infinitely rewarding. Having journeyed through the research it is evident that many threads are still loose in this tapestry but it was my joy and privilege to be part of the weaving. The emergent tapestry of stories from twelve generous families who welcomed me into their homes to hear their family narratives will stay forever in my memory.

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# Appendices

**Appendix A**

**Family Portraits**

<u>Arshad family</u>

The Arshad family consists of Amina and Nasir who are married and parents to two daughters Farah aged six and Razia aged four. Nasir is originally from Pakistan and Amina from Saudi Arabia their daughters have been born in Ireland. Both Amina and Nasir work full time as doctors. They live in the suburbs of a city in the South East of Ireland.

<u>Ahmed Family</u>

Abdul and Sabrina Ahmed are married and live with their two sons, Halim age seventeen and Hanif age nine. Sabrina's adult sister Cala also lives in the family home. Cala is single and a full time student. The family is originally from Pakistan but have lived in Ireland for more than ten years. Sabrina is a full time mother and Abdul is a doctor. They live in the suburbs of a city in the South East of Ireland.

<u>Barrett Family</u>

The Barrett family consists of married couple Agnes and Joseph and their two daughters Erica aged seven and Rebecca aged four. The Barretts home school their daughters and live in the countryside where they keep hens and pigs as well as the family pets. Joseph is a teacher and Agnes is a full time mother. Joseph's mother Eileen lives in a granny flat attached to their home.

<u>Giles Family</u>

Mum Margaret, dad J.P and their two daughters, Kirstie aged nine and Lily aged six live in a suburban location in the South East of Ireland. Margaret is a full time mother and J.P manages a supermarket in a nearby town. The family have recently

moved house form a smaller house a short distance away. The family have a cat and a rabbit.

Golden family

The Golden family comprise of Annika and Brendan who have been married for seven years and their daughters Isla aged six and Milly aged two and a half. Annika's mother and stepfather live with the family, Annika is a Swedish national. Annika is a full time mother and Brendan has recently become unemployed and is studying part time. They live in the suburb of a city in The South East of Ireland.

Hanlon Family

The Hanlon family consists of married couple Ursula and Bill and their four daughters, Sile aged thirteen years, Sorcha aged eleven years, Heidi aged nine years and Ciara aged five years. Ursula is currently a student and Bill has recently become unemployed. The family live in the countryside in a converted barn which they are currently renovating. Ursula's parents and sister live on the same piece of land. The have a three legged dog Rusty, and various cats and hamsters.

Keyes family

The Keyes family are married couple, Martha and Donal and their three children Mairead, aged twelve years, Oisin, aged nine years and Aoife, aged five years. Martha is a primary school teacher and Donal works in technology management. The family live beside the sea in a rural location. The family has many pets.

Lawlor family

The Lawlor family comprises of Mum Mandy and her non-identical twin daughters Ali and Grace who are aged five years. Mandy separated from the girl's father when they infants, the couple were never married. Ali and Grace see their father very regularly. The Lawlors live in the countryside beside a wood and Mandy is a currently a full time Mum, but is planning to return to paid employment in very soon. The girls have just started school.

Maguire family

The Maguire family consist of married couple Harriet and James and their four children, two adults, Sarah age twenty three, Shane aged twenty one, and two teenagers, Bradley, aged seventeen and Elaine aged fifteen. Sarah, the oldest daughter does not live at home anymore but visits the family home often. Harriet owns her own playschool and James is self -employed. The family live in the country but close to a city in the South East of Ireland. Both Harriet and James are self- employed and their businesses are based from home. The family have a Labrador dog.

Shee family

Monica Shee lives with her daughter Louisa aged five, in the suburbs of a city in the South East of Ireland. Monica and her ex-husband separated very shortly after Louisa's birth. Louisa sees her Dad regularly as he lives nearby. Monica works fulltime outside the home. The family have a cavalier King Charles spaniel.

Walsh Family

Sharon Walsh aged is a single Mum to Jeff aged nine years. Sharon was in a relationship with Jeff's father Phil but they couple never married. Jeff sees his father frequently. The family live in a seaside town in the South East of Ireland. Sharon has recently started a full time course in a University in a city some distance away so she is away Monday to Friday. Sharon and Jeff live in their own home in the South East of Ireland at weekends but during the week Jeff moves between a friend's home and his Grandmother Celine who is a very supportive in her role towards Sharon and Jeff.

O' Brien Family

In the O' Brien Family, Jennifer is Mum to three children, Jill aged twelve years, and twins Adam and Amy aged eight years. Jennifer and the children's Dad John are separated, the children see him frequently. Jennifer works full time as a teacher in a city in the South East of Ireland. The family live in the suburbs of a medium sized town in South Leinster.

**Appendix B**

**Interview Schedule**

Introduce myself and the research topic. Thank participants for agreeing to take part in the interview. Explain the participant consent form and reassure family members that they will remain anonymous throughout the research process and that they have the right to withdraw at any time. Explain this is to be a relaxed an informal interview. You do not have to answer anything that makes you feel uncomfortable and we can stop at any time or take a break. Explain the use of the digital voice recorder.

**Topics for interviews**

**Time**

Do you feel you have enough time together?

**Mealtimes,**

Where?

Who helps? /chores

Are they different at the week-end?

**Special Days,**

How are these celebrated?

Parents: Family traditions from your own family of origin passed down?

Do you have any family traditions around these occasions?

Birthdays

Christmas

Religious celebrations, Communion, Confirmation, meeting relatives

Other special occasions?

Holidays?

## Technology and the family

Television-favourite family show?

Computer, PC/ laptop

Games consoles

Mobile phones

## Play

Inside/outside play

How far can away can children go away from the house?

Does the family have pets?

Tell me about friends?

School

## Spaces

Where do the family spend most of their time at home?

Do the children have their own bedrooms?

Does the family have a playroom?

## Commuting in the car

Do you spend much time in the car?

If so, what is this like?

## Wider family

What about spending time with Grandparents, aunts' uncles?

**Finally:** would you like to add anything else? Is there anything you thought I left out?

# Appendix C

Dept.Applied Arts

College Street Campus,

Waterford Institute of Technology,

Waterford.

Dear

My name is Katie Cagney. I am currently a post-graduate student of the Master in Arts (Research) programme in the Centre for Social and Family Research, Department of Applied Arts at Waterford Institute of Technology.

My research is titled 'Weaving Stories; narratives from inside Irish families' and is under the supervision of Jacinta Byrne-Doran and Fergus Hogan, Co-ordinator of the Centre for Social and Family Research. The key focus of this research is the exploration of children's and parents lived experiences of family life in modern Ireland.

The research will carry out interviews with the parents and children in the family, and the participants will be asked to discuss their day to day to activities in the family unit. Key questions will relate to what kind of time and space do families share together? How do families manage and use their time? What impact does commuting have on the daily practices of families? What family rituals - e.g., meal times, sports, leisure, shopping – bind families given the various pressures and constraints that seem to affect families. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Waterford Institute of Technology Ethics Committee.

I would be very grateful if you would consider displaying and information leaflet asking for participants for this research in your community centre. It may also be possible for you to draw attention to the research to particular persons who may be interested in participating. I appreciate that due to your workload and the nature of your services that this may not be possible.

I have enclosed the information leaflet and I will ring you next week and if it is convenient for you we could discuss this further.

I am looking forward to talking to you next week.

Yours faithfully,

Katie Cagney

# Appendix D

## PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS

**You are asked to participate in a postgraduate research study conducted by Katie Cagney, from the Centre for Social and Family Research, Department of Applied Arts at Waterford Institute of Technology.**

The study is titled **'Weaving Stories; narratives from inside Irish families'**

**There is an information sheet with this form, explaining what the study is all about and what we hope to do with this study. Katie will read it with you and please ask Katie to explain anything that you do not understand on the information sheet.**

**Katie is under the supervision of Jacinta Byrne-Doran and Fergus Hogan, Co-ordinator of the Centre for Social and Family Research. If you have any questions or concerns about this research or information contained in this form, please feel free to contact Jacinta Byrne-Doran, jbdoran@wit.ie.**

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the everyday practices in Irish families, with reference to the children in the family as well as the parents.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This research seeks to gain understanding of the ordinary practices and cultural life within Irish families today and therefore the changes within families in contemporary Irish society.

**PROCEDURES**

**If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:**

Participate in a one-to-one interview, lasting about forty to sixty minutes with the researcher about various aspects of day to day activities in your family.

Be open and honest in answering the questions asked. What you say to the researcher will be confidential and every possible measure will be taken to ensure that you will not be identified. The researcher will only know your identity and your name will not be used when writing up the research.

You may refuse to answer questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. This means that if at any point you wish to end the interview and/ or withdraw from this study you may do so. Also if at any point the researcher feels that you are emotionally unable to participate they may also end the interview and/or your participation in the study. Your welfare will always be the main concern.

It is possible that speaking about your family life may result in feelings of discomfort. The researcher will keep this in mind at all times and do their best to approach these matters in the most sensitive manner possible.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.**

During the interview you will be recorded by a digital voice recorder. This information will then be transcribed and thereafter will be placed in a password-protected file so that it cannot be accessed by anyone other than the researcher. The recordings of the interview will be kept for the duration of the research and a period of two years thereafter. The information you give will be used only for the purposes of this research unless you agree otherwise.

Your name will be changed in order to protect your identity and the researcher will have only one document, password protected, on computer stating your actual name and the 'new' name so that the only person who can identify you is the researcher. None of these files will be printed into paper format. Should it be necessary to do so for any unforeseen reason the file will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and immediately shredded once it has served its purpose.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Waterford Institute of Technology Ethics Committee. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

ETHICS COMMITTEE

Waterford Institute of Technology,

Cork Road,

Waterford.

**CONSENT SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided for this study **'Weaving Stories; narratives from inside Irish families'**

 **My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate with this study. I have been given a copy of this form.**

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

_____

Name of Participant (please print)

_____

_____

Signature of Participant                                                    Date

**SIGNATURE OF WITNESS/RESEARCHER**

_____

Name of Witness/Researcher (please print)

_____

_____

Signature of Witness /Researcher                                        Date

**Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research of this kind?**

**Yes            No**

**Thank you for your participation in this study.**

**Appendix E**

**PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS**

We would like you to take part in a project that will hopefully be interesting and fun. Your mother or father must also give permission for you to take part, so please be sure to ask them questions about anything that you that you do not understand, as it is important that they know exactly what you feel about all of this.

The person who is in charge of this study, and who will ask you questions, is Katie Cagney who is a postgraduate student studying at the Waterford Institute of Technology. If there is anything you need to ask Katie, please feel free to ask whatever questions you want.

*The study is titled 'Weaving Stories; narratives from inside Irish families'*

There is information sheet with this form, explaining what the study is all about and what we hope to do with this study. Please read it and ask your parents or Katie to explain anything that you do not understand on the information sheet.

If you have any questions that you do not want to ask either Katie or your parents, or if you are worried about anything to do with this study, please contact Jacinta Byrne-Doran jbdoran@wit.ie As Jacinta is in charge of the whole thing, she knows all about it.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

We are asking people about their families and how they spend time together.

**PROCEDURES**

**If you agree to join in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:**

Talk to the researcher for about forty to sixty minutes, where the researcher will ask you questions.

Be open and honest in answering the questions asked.

Your answers will remain secret and we will make sure that nobody else will see them. We will not use your name when we make notes on your answers.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

You might feel a bit embarrassed or uncomfortable with some of the questions. There is nothing wrong with you feeling these things and if you do not want to answer a question or if you want to stop for a while, please tell the person who is asking the questions. The person asking the questions will not get angry if you do not want to answer questions or if you want to stop for a while. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.

If the interview becomes too upsetting or if 'abuse' is reported, the interview will stop but Katie and Jacinta will help you with this matter.

We are not allowed to give you money for this – Sorry about that!


**CONSENT SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICPANT**


**I have read the information sheet for the study and I am happy with the answers given to my questions, and I agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.**


**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**


_____

Name of Participant (please print)


_____          _____

Signature of Participant                                             Date


**SIGNATURE OF PARENT**


_____

Name of Parent (please print)

_____          _____

Signature of Parent                                                                      Date




**SIGNATURE OF WITNESS/RESEARCHER**




_____

Name of Witness/Researcher (please print)




_____          _____

Signature of Witness/Researcher                                             Date




Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research of this kind?

Yes                           No

**Appendix F**

# Research on Families

**What is the study about?**

The research aims to carry out in-depth interviews with families, including the children.

The study will explore issues relating to the ordinary everyday practices in families in Ireland today.

For Example,

How do modern families like to spend their leisure time together?

If you spend a lot of time travelling in the car to school after school activities, what kind of things do you chat about?

What kind of fun stuff do you do? Do the children like computer games or going out to play?

How do you spend Special days like Birthdays, Christmas, or Religious occasions?

Where do you spend most of your time at home?

**Who's carrying out the research?**

The research will be conducted by a post-graduate student as part of a Master's in Arts (Research) programme in the centre for Social and Family Research, Department of Applied Arts in Waterford Institute of Technology.

**If you are interested in participating...**

Please contact me for further information: <u>katiecagney@eircom.net</u> 0876611095

**Appendix G**

Research Information from participants

Could you please supply the following;

Age

Age of children

Occupation

Religion

Any questions or comments about the research?

Please only fill it what you feel comfortable with.

Many thanks for your help

# Appendix H

**Excerpts from Reflexive Research Journal**

**Pilot family interview**

**26th of September 2009**

*Excerpt after this interview;*

The pilot was with a Mum and her three children aged eight to twelve. The family lived in a small town in Leinster. The interview was conducted at the kitchen table, but later moved into the children's den and then the garden.

I felt quite nervous as this was my first real family interview. I explained to the children exactly what they could expect from the interview, how a little voice recorder would be used to record what they say and that they should try not to be shy and to speak loudly if they wanted to say something. I expected that each child would take turns to speak with the recorder on. In order to identify each child, I requested that the child say their name before speaking. However this did not work out as expected. In the midst of conversation the children forgot to say their name. Eventually a few minutes into the pilot interview this plan was abandoned. (This issue was later overcome by adding the child's pseudonym on the transcript after the interview) which proved to be quite time consuming for me but I couldn't think of an alternative. I thanked the participants, both children and adults for their contribution to the research process after the interview and in a follow up thank you letter. A few of the questions posed during the interview elicited only a yes or no answer from the children, so these were re worded for the next interview to have a more open orientation. I felt pretty tired but really excited after this interview and eager to start the next one.

**Pilot focus group interview**

13ᵗʰ September 2009

*Excerpt from pilot focus group*

This focus group was with six mothers at a local school in Waterford city, it was arranged by my gatekeeper Jacqui. I hope to recruit some families for the study from this discussion and to refine my interview questions. We met over tea and scones in the parent's room in the school. We talked generally about spending time together as families and family celebrations. Birthday parties were a much commented on topic during this interview. One mother, Lucy spoke of how she felt she had to have an enormous birthday party for her young daughter as she had been very busy with work in the weeks leading up to the party. Eventually Lucy organised to have thirty children to the party many of whom then slept over, the party didn't end until 4pm the following day whereupon they received a party bag full of treats on their departure. Another mother, Ann explained that one of the parents in her son's class had hired a bus to transport the entire class of children to the cinema then on to a well-known fast food chain and finally the bus dropped the children home. However Yvonne a mother said that in her childhood birthdays were not marked or were very simple affairs by comparison to standards today. All the mothers in the group agreed with this sentiment. Yvonne went on to say that going for walks in the countryside was the way that she liked to spend time with her three children and that this had the added bonus that it didn't cost anything. Our discussion covered aspects such a sitting down to meals as families versus eating in front of the television and the difficulty in getting some children to eat a wide variety of foods. Although this focus group generated a lot of ideas, this format for interviewing did not feel right, it had too many challenges and does not get to the heart of what I would like to know. I hoped to recruit families out of this pilot group but I did not succeed in doing so which is disheartening.

**Interview with the Lawlor Family**

**October 19th 3.15pm.**

*Excerpt of reflections after the interview*

The Lawlor family consists of Mum Mandy and her non-identical twin daughters Ali and Grace who are aged five years. Mandy separated from their father when they infants, the couple were never married. Ali and Grace see their father very regularly. The Lawlors live in the countryside beside a wood in South Leinster. Mandy is a currently a full time Mum, but is planning to return to paid employment in very soon, she is a successful artist. The girls have just started school nearby. The interview went well I thought, we sat at the kitchen table then went outside into the garden. After the interview today I felt like perhaps I had been too informal and perhaps stayed too long. It can be difficult to judge sometimes when the point of departure from the family home should happen, very quickly after the interview or a bit slower leaving time for a winding down with questions and general comments. I felt like I was imposing on the participant's time but I senses that they appreciated their story being listened to. The girls were some of the youngest to be interviewed and the interview had been quite challenging at the start to get them engaged with the process, however they really yielded up lots of very interesting experiences. The interview eventually last ninety minutes and was hard to close down. I wondered if perhaps I had stayed too long chatting after the interview was over? Maybe I get relaxed and am relieved when all the topics have been covered and the interview feels like it has gone well. I find it hard to switch off the recorder and dash out the door when we have just developed a fledgling rapport with the family especially the children.

**Interview with the Barrett family**

**26<sup>th</sup> of October 2pm**

*Excerpt of reflections after the interview*

This interview was carried out at the home of the Barretts. Mum Agnes, Dad Joseph and children, Erin aged seven years and Rebecca aged four years. It was a beautiful countryside location in Leinster, about a two hour drive away from my home. The day was bright and clear and the interview ended being spread over a couple of hours. I felt very appreciative of the family's time. The family live in a large detached home with an annex where Joseph's (Dad) mother Emma lives. The house is surrounded by three acres of land and some beautiful mature trees. The family have a variety of animals, from dogs to hens, turkeys, pigs, donkeys. The interview began at the kitchen table with all four family members and then we moved to the garden so the children, Erin and Rebecca could walk me through their play spaces. I kept my voice recorder on as we walked around to record what the children said about their play spaces. Eventually we went back inside to the family kitchen and continued the interview inside. Sometimes there is greater rapport with certain individuals and sometimes the opposite is true, I felt a little uncomfortable at times during this interview. I found Agnes quite an intense person and at times I felt quite daunted when asking follow up questions during the interview. Agnes seemed very eager to communicate to me what a great mother and mentor she is to her children. She clearly is a really engaged parent and seemed to have set herself very high standards in regards to the care of the children. I became increasingly conscious throughout the interview that I needed to put her at her ease and remain as open as non- judgemental in my language and body language as possible. Nonetheless I felt exhausted after the interview and anxious that I had hurt her feelings.

**Interview with the Arshad family**

**November 13<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm**

Below are my reflections in the immediate aftermath of the interview when I interviewed a Muslim family, a mother and her two daughters, the Arshad family. This I feel illustrates the complex positioning between myself as the researcher and the participants.

My gatekeeper 'Cala' had helped me to recruit two Muslim families, the Ahmeds and Arshads which I was delighted about. I arrived in the pouring rain to do the interview with Amina Arshad and her family, however this interview was not in her own home but in the home of a friends, the Ahmeds whom I had already interviewed a few weeks earlier. Amina consented to be interviewed along with her two daughters in the Ahmed's house, the Ahmed family were also in the house but did not take part in the interview. This was quite interesting as I didn't get to see Amina's home. It was as if Amina was removed from her home setting, the clues and contextual information that I had available to me seemed very much less and as if a dimension of her and her family was lost to the research process. The interview seemed very naked without the details she was explaining being visible to me relative to the other interviews I had conducted. This made me reflect on the information that I was unconsciously taking in, was I using much more than I was recording to from impressions of the families? I was clearly reflecting greatly on the context of the interviews while in the in the families' homes. During the interview with Amina her two daughters were very active and the mother from the host family (Mrs. Ahmed) came in to the room (a prayer room) where the interview was taking place several times and offered us tea and traditional snacks. This was most hospitable, but at times broke the flow of the narrative that Amina and her daughters were explaining. I was aware that as a guest in the home I should expect this kind of hospitality but it was challenging to keep a focus on the interview. After all, I was a guest and was only being offered kindness and courtesy. We all sat on a mat on the floor throughout the interview, which felt very different for me, I found it hard to concentrate because I felt slightly self-conscious. As I didn't have a great of knowledge about Muslim family traditions prior carrying out the interviews I did some research beforehand in order to familiarise myself with some key Muslim

customs and practices. My aim was to practice culturally responsive interviewing as proposed by Vazquez-Montilla aiming to be as sensitive as possible to cultural differences during the interview. For instance, taking care to be appropriately dressed when conducting the interviews and removing my shoes when entering the home. knowledge of the interviewees' culture and community, this was achieved with some background reading but mostly with help of 'Cala' a Muslim woman herself who informed me about appropriate ways to interact during the interview. Cala had explained also that when entering a Muslim home for a visit it is tradition to eat any food that is offered and that is polite to accept this offering, indeed this proved to be the case with both Muslim families.

I asked the children quite a few background questions before the interview started, mostly about traditional ceremonies like the Haj and Ramadan and the type of food that is eaten at these times. The children were particularly eager to explain these details to me, like how there are two festivals called Eid, Eid –ul-adha which marks the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, the 'Hajj' when traditionally lamb and sweet treats are eaten. Also a second Eid, Eid –al-fitr which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan and again the celebrations again focus on sweets. The two young girls in the Arshad family also explained the traditional clothes they wear for special occasions. At times I did feel under pressure trying to make sure that I acted as respectfully as possible, any illusion of complete control over the interview process is gone once you enter a family's home and this fact is accentuated when the interview is out of you own culture. I learned that I had to be content with the direction the interview took even when it felt as though it was going very off topic. Notwithstanding it yielded up some very interesting data and was very enriching.

# Appendix I

# Sample Interview Transcript

I        So here we go and this is Katherine Cagney and it's the 1st of December and it's about five o clock and I'm in *****, with a lovely view of the estuary and Wexford with the Keyes family and I've got Martha Keyes, Aoife Keyes, Mairead Keyes and Oisin so thank you very much for helping me.

R      You're very welcome.  You're welcome.

I      Thank you so Aoife do you want to start and tell me a few things about the kind of games you like to play and the toys you love to play with?

R      I love playing with the computer and club penguin.

I      And Club Penguin, tell me more about Club Penguin?

R      I'm a member of it.  Tell us about Club Penguin and what you do in it?  You go on this penguin and you play games and you can change them and you can get clothes, but you can't really do much things if you are not a member.

I      Oh right so are you a member?

R      Yeah.

I      Oh right.

R      Well so I'm (01:02.4 that star that puts on a blue dress).

I      Very good and so do you play any other games besides Club Penguin?

R      Yeah I do.  What does mum says.

I      That's on the computer as well?

R      Yeah.

I  And do you play, do you have a Nintendo?

R  No but I'm getting a DS from Santa.

I  Oh right that would be lovely wouldn't it.

R  And I have a favourite doll but I can't get a name for it.  I just can't think of one.

I  Oh dear you are going to have to think about a name for the poor dolly.

R  Which doll is that?  You know that doll's game with the blue dress?  Oh yeah.  I take it in the car every day.  You'd be very bored if you don't have it because you've nothing to play with.

I  And I forgot to ask you how old are you?

R  Five.

I  Five years old.

R  Yeah.

I  My goodness and are you in school?

R  Yeah senior infants.

I  And who's your teacher?

R  Miss Ruin.

I  And do you play, what kind of games do you play when you are in school at break time?

R  My favourite game is a marble one.

I  Oh right okay.

R  See you get marbles, there's marbles and there's loads of different bits you can make a run for the marble and then drop the marble in and it goes along the run.

I  I know exactly the marbles go quite quickly don't they?

R      Yeah.

I      And is that?

R      If you don't they stop, if you don't put it on properly.

I      Okay so you have to be careful?

R      Yeah that you put it on properly because it just stops and you can't find it because it's hard and you have to stick it in because sometimes it goes sideways, so you have to stick it in properly if you want to go down to the end.

I      Perfect and is that in your classroom Aoife?

R      Yeah but it's up on the shelf so people don't take it down themselves.

I      Oh right so teacher takes it down.

R      Yeah because that's why teacher goes over that so she can get it down, because she doesn't want any of the children to fall.

I      Okay that's fair enough isn't it?

R      Yeah.

I      To be careful, so tell me about when you are at home, do you ever play in your garden?

R      Yeah but, I even forget what I done, because we didn't play for days because it's always raining.

I      Yes well it has been very rainy recently hasn't it?

R      Yeah.

I      But in the summer time do you play?

R      Yeah there's this huge slide and a trampoline that I bounce on.

I      Oh you've got a trampoline?

R      Yeah, last week it's so dark.

I       Yeah right now its dark.

R       Well its morning time you can see it.

I       Okay and so do you ever play on it before school?

R       No but when it's snowing, you see we are allowed go into the snow before school.  In case it would be gone when they come home.

I       Yeah you have to make the most of it when it's snowing, I mean you are not going to waste time like that are you?

R       Yeah but I never made a snowman.

I       No, there isn't much snow here is there?

R       No.

I       A lot of children have said to me.

R       We made a snowman around that size.

I       Yeah it would be nice to have one good fall.

R       Yeah Mairead made it because she's the oldest.

I       And where did you make it in the garden?

R       Yeah.  Wasn't it very hard?  Yeah we had nearly all the snow from our garden and it ended up being like 10 centimetres tall.

I       Oh that was all when you rolled the snow, oh that was a shame wasn't it?

R       Yeah.

I       I think yeah we lose out here in the south east of Ireland that we don't have the snow.

R       I know.  The south east and it rains, no snow.  Because we don't get snow.

I       And Oisin do you ever play in the garden here?

R       A lot.  All of the time rain, snow.  Slush.

I      And do you play by yourself or?

R      Yeah sometimes not.  I love it but I can't stay in it.

I      You like to watch.

R      Yeah.

I      So Oisin do you have like goal posts or anything in your garden?

R      I've got a soccer goal posts and straight down there and I usually kick the ball up against the wall out there.

I      Right so you can practice, and do you play sport after school or anything?

R      Yeah I play rugby on Saturday mornings, usually rugby match on Sunday's and I do guitar on Thursday and I used to go to soccer but the times have now changed, so I quit that.  But it's changed, we have to suss it out actually, they've changed it from a Monday to a Friday and the matches are on a Saturday and they are clashing with the rugby, so we need to sort him out with the soccer because he loves it, and just see if we can get some time, something that doesn't clash with his rugby.

I      So you are busy, you have a lot.  But it is a shame when you have a great interest you know not to be able to.

R      We have to get the soccer again going you know, it's only the last week you missed, he was going up to the week before that and then they changed the thing.

I      Oh that was very disappointing when you realised and so do you spend a good bit of time going to and from?  And what do you do in the car Aoife when you?

R      I play with the doll.

I      The doll?

R      Yeah I bring her in the car.

I      Oh right and where do you stand.

R      And only today I brought her in and tomorrow I'm just going to bring her back out in the car.

I      Yeah and she doesn't mind the car?

R      No she doesn't mind the car.

I      Oh right okay.

R      I never have her the whole night, I just bring her out and then put her back in and then.

I      Oh right that wouldn't be very nice for a doll I suppose over night would it? And do you chat with mum in the car?

R      Yeah and I love music.

I      Oh tell me about the music please?

R      My favourite song is Thriller.

I      Is pardon?

R      Thriller Michael Jackson.

I      Thriller.

R      And my second favourite is Ghostbusters.

I      Oh I love that, do you ever watch Jedward?

R      Yeah too bad they are out of the X Factor.

I      Oh that's a shame, they are great.

R      I think they just slipped and went way down last week.

I      Yeah.

R      And do you remember they were on the Late Late Toy Show.

I      I missed that, did ye all watch that together?

R      Yeah.  They didn't sing though, they just talked.

I       Right.

R       Yeah they were really funny.

I       And come here do you watch, do you ever watch TV programmes together as a family?

R       We always do.

I       Always.

R       Yeah we love the news.   We watch it every day.

I       And is there anything that you, do you sometimes have to go to bed and everybody else stays up or ...?

R       Yeah it's annoying because I can't get to sleep because I'm just lying there doing nothing.  (laughter)

I       Brilliant.  You are fantastic, so tell me what happens when you watch the X Factor, do you all sit down say, get time to watch the X Factor?

R       We do now for the Toy Show last Friday and make it special when we were all watching it together?  We got popcorn, I didn't like popcorn so I could have some Smarties.

I       Oh right but you had a little special snack like because it was the Toy Show and you were all watching it together?

R       Yeah well it wasn't really a snack it was kind of like a candy house.

I       A candy house.

R       And I was singing about Club Penguin, I love Club Penguin, and I was just saying I have a candy house.

I       Oh right so it's kind of like being on Club Penguin but you are at home.

R       Yeah.  And we lit the fire didn't we?  And we got Coke.  Ah yuk! because my favourite drink is milk.

I       That's very good for you isn't it, good woman, so that was nice, I think yeah.

R        And my favourite fruits are strawberries.

I        Do you know they are one of my favourites as well.

R        I love them when the ice cream is on them.

I        Or cream as well or ice cream.

R        I don't like cream.

I        No alright.

R        Or vanilla ice cream.  I only like mint, chocolate chip or chocolate.

I        Okay and come here Aoife do you ever help with the jobs like setting the table?

R        Yeah only if I can get sweets after.

I        She's very wise.  (laughter) So well in our house there is bribes as well, I have to be honest, you know you need a little carrot sometimes don't you?  And do you have, well we are going to talk about pets, do you have a pet?

R        Well my brother owns two guinea pigs and for the family we have nine fish.  Well six of them died, now we have three.

I        And are they your fish Mairead?

R        They are my dad's.

I        Oh right are they like.

R        He has to share them I like them too.  My dad is the only one that likes the fish.  We don't even know how many fish are in it, Donal is the big fish lover.  What I love doing with the fish is I love feeding them.  We've got five fish actually, we've got two small one's you know.

I        And Oisin will you tell me about the guinea pigs?

R        One goes really fast and is orange, a bit of brown, white and black.  And one is called squeak.  And the other one is called squeak, his fur is all spiked up, he's called an Abyssinian guinea pig and he is grey with white.

I        Right do you know I love those rough guinea pigs they are really nice aren't they?

R        Oh yeah, well squeak is a bit rough isn't he?  What's he?  Abyssinian.  He's an Abyssinian.

I        I love those.  We had guinea pigs at one time, one lived till eight years old.

R        Ah go away.

I        Yeah but then only recently now about two years ago the last one died Frieda was her name.

R        Ah one who died during the summer I'm afraid.  And we got a new one.

I        We had a few tragedies over the years as well and rabbits the same, so do you take care of the guinea pigs Oisin?

R        Yeah we've got five different types, we've got two outside, no two outside, two inside and one is in the shed.

I        That's a lot, that sounds that you know it's quite complicated.

R        His daddy builds them.  Donal is into the guinea pigs you see in a big way and he is a massive pet, it's a pity he isn't here actually, so Donal builds these different runs for them outside and inside.

I        So they have luxury accommodation Oisin.

R        And when my dad was young he had 12 guinea pigs at one stage.

I        Oh wow and like years ago people didn't have, you know guinea pigs like it might be a dog or.  And do you have a dog or a cat?

R        No.

I        No guinea pigs I have a huge fondness for.

R        I want a dog.

I        Well now maybe another.  Do you know we were talking a little while ago about birthdays, you like celebrating birthdays and?

R       Yeah.

I       Tell us about your birthday Mairead, if you don't mind?

R       I don't mind, we had a great day, is this my birthday or my party?

I       Yeah your birthday.

R       Your actual birthday.

I       Oh birthday do you know even if it was a thing that you do special as a family for a birthday.

R       There is. Yeah we usually go to Gino's or a place and the birthday person gets to pick what they eat for dinner that day, and they get all the presents in the morning before we go to school usually and we just have a great day.

I       So it starts kind of first thing.

R       Yeah. I did one for my birthday last year. And then my mum and dad put banners saying happy birthday all over the house, every single place in the house. Decorations didn't they on the door.

I       Oh isn't that lovely?

R       Yeah.

I       When you get up like every year, oh that's very nice, god I'd love that and then you have a party with your friends?

R       Yeah.

I       On a day that's convenient like?

R       Yeah. On my birthday I had a Dalmatian and bouncy castle.

I       Oh wow.

R       And I didn't just have sweets in my party bags, I had pens and bits of paper and loads of different things like that.

I       Oh that was nice.

R       I love (13:36.6 inaudible) and things like that and craft.

I       Oh yes tell me about that, were do you do your art?

R       Well you see I have magazines but you see my mum and dad are always busy and my brother and sister are too, so I never really get time because I can't do it myself, so I never get time to do all of them and I like a new one every day so I got loads of them.

I       He is some dad I'll have to meet this dad, he loves fish, he's great with the guinea pigs and he goes to rugby matches with Oisin and he also brings you lovely art and craft things.

R       Yeah.

I       He sounds like a brilliant daddy.

R       Oh yeah.  That was cool.  Daddy (14:23.9 inaudible) and just did that, he broke it, you are supposed to pull out the thing so it didn't work, so he just grabbed it and he dropped it down and it just fell because daddy is that stupid, that was actually very funny everyone was laughing.

I       And what kind of a *piñata* was it, was it like?

R       It was a horse with a lot of different colours.

I       Oh like a classic.

R       And I love horses.  It was a unicorn.  Oh yeah.

I       Tell me do you go horse riding?

R       No but I did once at a Ballygunner party, you see I just went, see I and Mairead went horse riding.

I       Do you go horse riding Mairead?

R       No I went horse riding once at my friend's birthday party about two years ago, and it was really fun.

I        You never went Oisin?  Come here tell me about the great treat you had on Saturday Oisin?

R        Really a good match, oh really foggy at the end so you could hardly see it and the other side of the pitch it was just really foggy, so it was really hard to see.

I        Yeah I saw the players breath you could see couldn't you?

R        Yeah there was fog everywhere and at the very last second, they were going over for the tri when Brian O'Driscoll hammered some guy, he knocked the ball on so he got stunned and then Ireland got a penalty.  He's met all the players and everything at this stage, Oisin is a kind of a celebrity in Munster at this stage.

I        Well you are a man after my own heart, although Johnny Sexton was amazing but my heart bled over Ronan.

R        I know.

I        Another number ten.  Oh no that was a great match wasn't it?

R        Yeah.  That was taken on Saturday actually with John Hayes yeah.

I        And his ears don't look too bad there.

R        No and I was looking at them last night and I said to Oisin, because Oisin plays rugby, I said to Oisin last night that's what your ears are going to look like now in another few years.

I        Not at all, no no because Brian O'Driscoll's don't or Ronan's don't.

R        That's true.  The day I was in the scrum.

I        What position do you play?

R        Usually scrum half and sometimes centre.

I        So that's like 13 or 9 is it?

R        13 or 9 yeah.

I        Yeah so your ears should be okay.  You've got the looks you see to be a number 13 or a 10.  I think those forwards with all due respect kind of are (16.55 inaudible due to laughing), you are too good looking for that.

R        John (16.58 inaudible) actually is (17.00 inaudible) told him that and he was like five steps down from me.

I        Yeah isn't he, you would think that because he's broad and short but I saw him there he's huge, did you see it last night of the year of the grand slam and they interviewed all the players yeah it was great.

R        He got 96 caps for Ireland.

I        And I hope he gets to his hundredth.

R        Yeah.

I        And who's nearly at a hundred as well, is it Ronan is it?

R        No actually, he's about fourth back, I think its O'Driscoll yeah.

I        Yeah it is O'Driscoll and do you know Ronan is the fifth best penalty scorer ever.

R        Best in Europe, he is the first number 10 to get a thousand points in one competition Heineken Cup.

I        Yeah he is amazing.

R        He's like my father lord have mercy on him.

I        Who's Birthday.  S. H.  and that's on Saturday the 5th and do you know that's my birthday.

R        Oh is it?

I        Oh right so she is just having a party, so this is to run amuck which is another kind of busy, you will have red checks.

R        Her mum is G H.

I        G H.  and you can read all this and you are only five years old.

R       She can read almost everything, eight, four, three, four.  That's look like a zero, I'd say the 7th.

I       Do you know it's a seven but it's an unusual way of writing seven Aoife. That's it, and come here tell me Aoife do you like reading stories at all, do you read books?

R       Yeah I love reading.

I       And what kind of stories do you like?

R       Well there's one that's really funny, it's about, it's called my dad, he's a hippo and a fish and a horse.  My dad is stronger than a hippo, he can swim like a fish.  We gave it to daddy for father's day was it pet?

I       That sounds quite appropriate for your dad doesn't it?

R       Yeah.  It is like him because he's really funny.

I       And do you like reading Oisin?

R       I'd say the rest of the family prefer it but its okay.  Well it depends.  It depends what books I'm reading yeah.  Yeah.  I really really really.  If you are reading the match programme, he reads them constantly, match statistics.

I       So there you know all about Ronan and what about you Mairead do you enjoy reading?

R       I really love reading yeah.

I       And what are you reading at the moment or have you a few things on the go?

R       I've finished almost every book in my library, I think there's tons and tons of books up there.  Well your latest author, who's he, your favourite one lately?  James Paterson.

I       Oh right okay and tell us what's the title?

R       Oh Maximum Ride there's like a series of them and a new one is coming out in February, I can't wait for it to come out.

I       It's great to love stuff isn't it, you look forward to.

R             I have a book in my library that I never read. because I have so much books.

I       Do you have your library in your room.

R       I have a book in my library that I never read.  Because I have so much books.

I       Do you have your library in your room?

R       Yeah.

I       And you each have a library in your own room?

R       Yeah.

I       That is a lovely, that's a lovely thing to have in your room.

R       But I have two ones at the side of the bed but they are just small ones.  So it's like a big library when you put them together.  It's just the one thing except there's a line going through it.  Yeah two shelves but attaching.

I       What about you Aoife, where's your library?

R       My bed is like here, the organisation of my room, like this part would be my bed.

I       Okay.

R       And the thing would be like here.


R       Yeah.

I       And shelves.

R       But my bed isn't that long, it's not taking up the whole room, and it's a space like here and that's all a big space and the library is about here, so it's not equal because the library is kind of bigger than my bed.

I       Oh I see it's sort of longer than your bed.

R       But exactly because the library takes up this space so, but then different orders of books.

I       Okay I understand that was very clear, do you play in your room Aoife?

R       Yeah a lot with my babies, I got this huge step for my birthday last year, it's huge, it takes up, we had to make a big space to fit it in, it's really hard to fit in, it was really hard to fit in my room, there's loads of things behind it, that's how big it is, we couldn't fit it into the attic we put stuff behind it.

I       So do you have a playroom in your house?

R       Well it isn't like a playroom but there's lots of toys in it.

I       Oh right okay.  But you have lots of room in your bedroom already and you have a lovely big garden.

R       Yeah actually, yeah I have loads of room but you know but my mum just wants to have a little space that we could walk into, so that's why they put the bedroom in there so it is isn't a playroom but – because you have to get into her room.

I       Oh I see so there's ...

R       ... because like at Mairead's party you see they had to walk through my bedroom, then it's on to Mairead's bedroom.  They are inter-connecting rooms.

I       Oh I see so ...

R       You go into Aoife's room, then mine.

I       So you had to have a path through because you had so many toys.

R       And there was loads of friends so they were all coming in so we had to you know spread out into the corners, so they could all like fit into my room.  Do you mean I spread them out into the corner.  Yeah Mairead does everything for me.

I       Oh the truth is coming out now.  You're honest and I can see a career in television for you, I think I see you as the next Miriam O'Callaghan.

R       Yeah.

I	Do you know who she is, she's a very pretty lady and she's very intelligent like you, she has beautiful hair like you, so you have interconnecting rooms.

R	Yeah.

I	That's nice so you are close together.

R	Yeah.

I	But you have your own space.

R	Yeah and when she is walking into my bedroom she always says goodnight to me.  Yeah and she's always awake.  Yeah I never get to sleep.  When she sees the door open she's like lying down again pretending she will never wake up.  (23:42 inaudible child cannot be clearly heard here).

I	So you are listening, you can hear.

R	Yeah because I pretend a little bit.  She's the comedian of the family.  Yeah. Like I pretend to snore or (24.04 inaudible child cannot be clearly heard here)

I	And Aoife and do you go to anything after school like dancing or do you?

R	I go to stage.

I	Oh stage school.

R	Yeah Mairead goes there too.  Yeah.

I	Oh tell me about that Mairead that looks really nicely run.

R	Yeah it's very very good and at Christmas time we do this show for the parents, there's drama and at the end of the year we go to where is it again?  Some ... (24.39 inaudible due to over speaking).  Yeah.

I	And do you sing or do you dance or ...?

R	I dance and we sort of sing to the songs, tons of us and we all dance as well.

I	And is there a show this Christmas?

R	Yeah there is, we have to do a few shows actually.

I       And do you go sort of like one or two days a week or is it sort of on a Saturday?

R       One day every week like Thursday, no it's either Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

I       Oh right.

R       One of those days.  No but how often when do you go ...? I go once every week.  For two hours.

I       Oh right okay.

R       It's drama for one hour and dancing and singing for the other hour.

I       So they run it together.

R       It's brilliant.

I       Yeah.

R       It's on one hour after the other it's brilliant.

I       And you can park there?

R       Yeah.

I       And so does Aoife?

R       She goes one hour at that age group, they do the drama for half an hour and the singing and dancing for half an hour.

I       So you go shopping or whatever?

R       Well normally its do the homework in the car with the two of them to be honest. If I'm organised I even bring a flask of tea sometimes. Yeah I've to wait for her.  Because Thursday is our mad day, she had this Richie Hayes four to five, Mairead is five to seven and he has guitar six to seven.

I       Oh right so you need snacks, a change of clothes.

R       Yes.

I And homework in the car yeah.

R We change our clothes and have our snack in Tesco and then we do our homework in the car outside Richie's.  Donal picks this one up and I pick him up because they are clashing.

I I think it's just the kind of age group of the family, that trying to keep everybody happy.

R Yeah and it's just that one day that they have that much stuff.

I It's always the way that it occurs on the one day.

R She has music on a Wednesday as well, Ceoltais and there's nothing else bar that on a Wednesday.

I And where's that Mairead?

R It's in town and my teacher N K she's amazing, she can play nearly every instrument, you ask her to play and she will say oh I have that, I can play that, she's really good, piano, flute, keyboard or something.

I And what do you play Mairead?

R The flute and tin whistle.

I Oh right oh very good because I think tin whistle is so tricky.

R But the flute is even, I love the flute.  You have to have a perfect position for your mouth and then your finger stretches out like that.  I do it a bit but I get a pain here, Mairead doesn't seem to get that.

I You have lovely hands though Mairead.

R She has the long fingers for it.

I The musician.

R Yeah.  So you have to stretch them really far because your fingers hold like that far apart.

I        Yeah I think I would be sort of cramped up or something, so do you ever play?

R        And it's not allowed rest on your shoulder, you need to keep it up for the whole song.  Yeah.  And it needs to be perfectly straight and your mouth needs to be right over the hole.

I        And do you ever play with Oisin or do you play together like with the guitar and the flute?

R        Sometimes.  Sometimes you do.  Donal plays guitar and that so.

I        Oh right okay.

R        Because we met in the musical society, Donal used to gig you see five nights a week.

I        Oh my goodness.

R        So Oisin plays guitar with his dad all the time actually and I play the flute as well, so we play together.

I        Oh right.

R        And I don't play any instrument and I'm going to play keyboards.

I        Yeah.

R        Next year.

I        Good woman.

R        She has decided herself this is what she wants to do.

I        And you could sing along, you could do your Ghostbusters and your Thriller.

R        I know all the words to Ghostbusters.  You don't actually.

I        Will you give us a little verse?

R        Only when I have the music.

I        Okay fair enough.

R      I can put on the music like then.  I'll get you the IPod, it's on the IPod.

I      Good woman we are going to have a performance.

R      Aoife.

I      While we are waiting for the IPod will you tell me about Christmas?

R      No the IPod turns on straight away.

I      Oh right.

R      Aoife just talk about Christmas.  Well all I remember is the surprises I get, I'll get my list.

I      Okay she's getting her list okay.

R      The shyest person on earth.

I      Oh my goodness.

R      It's on the chair Aoife hang on.  I got it.

I      Do you have any special traditions Mairead?

R      Yeah we have a wooden calendar under there and.

I      Oh I saw it when I came in the door yeah.

R      Yeah we have that and for Christmas.

I      Mairead is just telling me something and then I'll come back to this in a second Aoife.  Good woman.

R      Will you pause it for a minute.

I      Sorry Mairead, go ahead you were saying that you have a lovely wooden calendar, I saw that beautiful wooden calendar when I came in.

R      Yeah and it tells us to do something every single day and it's either be kind to someone or do something really nice or get a tree and write your letters for Christmas.

I       The wooden calendar.

R       Oh yeah there's a little message in it every day.

I       That's lovely isn't it?

R       And there's chocolate in it, I still remember eating the chocolate last year. That was on Christmas Day that chocolate.  Yeah.  Right will I put it on.

I       Are you ready?  Thanks Oisin.

R       Okay pick it up, we've got Ghostbusters with Aoife Keyes star of the stage, screen and radio, Ghostbusters.  Don't forget to sing.

I       Good girl you are the best.

R       (30:35.4 Aoife is singing Ghostbusters).

I       Wow very nicely sung.

R       Craziest family ever.

I       Good woman.

R       Turn it off now.

I       Thank you Aoife that was absolutely.  I can see you in front of Simon Cowell and Danni and Cheryl in a few years.  When you're 18.

R       One of my hobbies, when I get a hobby one of my ones is going to be singing and dancing.  Oh hobbies.  And they go to dancing too.

I       I think that would suit you extremely well I think singing and dancing.

R       Yeah.

I       And Oisin tell us about the guitar, who teaches you?

R       There's I go to Fly Fingers and my teacher is T.

I       Oh right, oh I think I've heard of him.

R       He owns Fly Fingers.

I        It's there beside C Avenue is it?

R        The Maxol station.  Yeah behind that.

I        Oh right so do you feel that you are kind of busier in the week than at the weekends?

R        A lot busier, at the weekend we can just relax.  Apart from swimming.  She has swimming, he has rugby.  Get swimming over.

I        And where do you play the matches Oisin?

R        Around Munster and some parts of Leinster.  Yeah the soccer team I suppose. I won't go flying over to London for a rugby match.

I        And who do you play for, is it Waterpark or?  That's fine it's grand.  So do you go up in the car with your dad or do you go on a bus to go up the matches?

R        Sorry my dad always brings me up to all the matches, unless it's up in Dublin or somewhere I go by bus.

I        Oh right okay.

R        The team will go up.

I        And so do your friends play rugby with you or is it?

R        A lot of people in my class play rugby for the boys.

I        And you are in the under 12's is it?

R        Under 10's.

I        Oh under 10's okay.

R        I was in under 11's for a while except I got told I had to be put in under 10's for some reason.  He's only nine you see.

I        Yeah so when's your birthday Oisin?

R        22nd of March.

I        Oh right okay so you are only nine and a half.

R        My birthday is the 15th of April.

R        Oh is it.

I        Now there we go now, isn't that gas?  So it's the 15th of April, the 12th of November and the 22nd of March.

R        Yeah god you've a great memory.  When is my birthday?  10th of February.  Why is it the 10th.  Thank you Mairead.  I always thought it was the 2nd, my mum's birthday is the 2nd, my dad's birthday is the 12th.  No he's the 3rd of July.  Oh (Laughter).

I        Is that a little rugby statistic.

R        Yeah exactly or any statistic of sport, any.

I        Okay I'll give you a, when is Ronan O'Gara's birthday?

R        The 10th of March.

I        7th of March.  Oh no you are right the 10th of March.

R        He's so into it, he knows lots.

I        And come here and thank you, you are being very patient with all my.

R        Do you remember my birthday?  The 15th of April.  Yeah.  And I know Donacadha O'Callaghan's birthday.

I        When is that?

R        23rd of March.

I        Oh I didn't know that actually.

R        Well one day off his so he can remember that.

I        Peter Stringer he's my actual favourite player in the world, although he has been side lined at the moment.

R        Yeah.  People used to tell Oisin he looked like Flannery.

I        You are meant to have a number 2 shirt.

R       He's better looking.

I       And come here do you ever meet up with a lot of people?

R       My mum's mum, she lives in Ballyduff Upper, well she used to live in Ballyduff Upper, she lives in Lismore now nursing home, we visit her nearly every weekend and our other granny lives in. Greystones. Greystones, Wicklow.

I       That's your dad's mum?

R       Yeah we visit her maybe once every two months, once every month. The two granddads are in heaven.

I       Oh right so you have the two grannies and no granddads.

R       Yeah but they remember my dad very well now, his anniversary actually, his two year anniversary was just the day before yesterday, yeah we were up for it.

I       So that was significant.

R       They wouldn't remember Donal's dad so much, he's dead seven years. I remember. My father adored these.

I       What did you call your granddad?

R       Lorry. He drove a lorry. His nick name was lorry. And what did you call your other grandfather? Brendad. Brendad because his name was Brendan and he got Brendad.

I       That's very good isn't it?

R       I nicknamed them both. I never even saw Brendad. No.

I       But you saw lorry.

R       Yeah.

I       What was lorry like?

R       He had I didn't say anything, I can't remember.

I       Can you remember Oisin?

R But I saw him. He had black hair and he was in hospital a lot, then after hospital he went down to the nursing home in Lismore where my granny, where my granny is now and then he went back to hospital for. Three weeks. I don't remember him but I saw him before. He got a stroke. And my mum was with him when he died.

I That was good wasn't it?

R Yeah. And he had the last two things he said to me before he died, was look after your mother and look after the lads, so these kids he adored them yeah.

I Are they the only grandchildren?

R No actually. We have tons of aunties. But they are the youngest, I'm the youngest of the family, not now but you were for a long time, for a long time. My sister's kids are grown up, one of them is married and everything you know. One of them is engaged. And one guy is thirty, you know my sister's kids are quite a bit older and these came along then when all the rest of them were kind of big.

I And your grandfather probably had time more.

R Exactly dad was retired and everything when these came along. Mummy. She they came along after, my brother then who then ended up getting married four years ago.

I Oh I remember yeah.

R They have two babies now, but sure my father wouldn't have known them do you know.

I No.

R But at the time these were the youngest grandchildren and when we were in Limerick mam and dad had the time, they were up all the time to us weren't they? Yeah. I mean they practically reared this one really.

I But isn't it amazing how when the grandparents have the time the connection.

R Oh the time spend is most important.

I    Absolutely yeah.

R    Mummy maybe I could have three but if I could only have one I'm the youngest. That's right. You will always be the youngest in this family. No she will be the youngest. No squeak. The guinea pig. But we didn't have squeak at the time. No. We didn't have any guinea pigs at the time. At the time Aoife was the youngest. Yeah. Squeak is only like five months old if not less.

I    And will you go up.

R    My brother normally goes, we still have the home place in Ballyduff you see.

I    Right.

R    Although there's nobody living in it, but we are always up and down to it.

I    Ballyduff Upper.

R    Ballyduff Upper exactly but Mike and Pauline that brother of mine now that has the babies, what they've done the last couple of Christmas that they had the Christmas in the house at home.

I    Oh right.

R    So it's only five miles you see from where my mother is, but my mother is so happy in Lismore, she won't even come out for Christmas, she will come out Christmas Eve maybe, but last year we begged her and begged her to come to one of us on Christmas Day and she said no I couldn't leave my friends behind, but my aunt is in there as well actually.

I    Oh right so.

R    It's not a nursing home you see actually, it's one of these retirement residential places. She was in the hospital for a while and what happened I don't know, she fell and. She broke her hip. She broke her hip yeah and she had to get a new hip and all, then she got in Waterford hospital, then she got moved to the hospital in ... Dungarvan. Dungarvan and she was there for ages. I like (40:18.4 inaudible) that was nice. Anyway we got to pick her up and we brought her to the nursing home and when she got there she had already written two songs. And I'm so

glad to be back with my friends.  She loves it.  Standing on her two crutches singing I'm so glad to be back with my friends again and all this, she loves it.  She barely said goodbye to us.  She didn't say goodbye to us and see it's a retirement home, they do yoga and music and she's the head singer and everything, so she sings in the choir, the priest of course comes in and does the mass every week and he'll say Sheila we couldn't do without you now, she feels so, she wouldn't live at home once dad died, she wouldn't live at home on her own, wouldn't come to any of us because she's one of these most selfless people you ever met, and we would all adore to have here, she's a great woman, no.

I       And her sister is there?

R       Well her sister in law but they were like sisters, because my uncle, because my dad and his brother lived right next door to each other, so my mother, the two couple's were very close, but dad died and his brother died, so the two widows were left, you know the sister's in law.

I       But isn't it a good complaint to be completely happy.

R       Oh it's so fantastic, it is so fantastic, she loves it, but the craic they have is unbelievable. I had gone up there on nights and they go up for this nine o clock tea at night and I haven't wanted to leave it, they laugh and love it yeah, the craic is something else, it's great.

I       They have so much of a good outlook on life and time and you know and enjoy every day.

R       Yeah so she will come obviously for a day over Christmas, but she won't stay the night and then she will go to my brother, we will all meeting up in my brother's house actually in ****** as well on the 29th but again she won't stay the night.

I       But you will see each other and?

R       Oh yeah we will all meet up.  We normally have it here, I normally do the family, the family get together here actually every year, but my brother decided this year he wanted to do it so that's great.  Look at my penguin.

I	Oh there's loads here, can I ask you one last thing?

R	Yeah.

I	What do you enjoy most about Aoife about spending time in family's?

R	Well.

I	What's the most fun or is there loads of fun things?

R	Well you know who, you know about my family or like what they are doing, with my family or?

I	Yeah what do you like?

R	Well what I love doing the most is you see, well.  It could be things you do on holidays or anything?

I	Yeah.

R	Oh things you do on holidays, what I love doing on holidays is when we go to the shops and together because we get, because there's loads of things and you know we are allowed buy stuff, because you bring loads of money and we are together so you know it's really good.

I	Thank you that's a really good way of spending time, what about you Oisin is there anything you particularly like doing?

R	I love spending my time being asked loads of random questions (laughter) and answering them.

I	Thank you, no with your family next, maybe going to a match with your dad?

R	Yeah I love going to matches with my dad as well and I love going on holidays of course.

I	And what about you Mairead?

R	I like spending time together because one of us will always just say something funny or else crack up laughing and then we will all be laughing and we will have actually a really good time.

I So it's just like everyday things like it could be anything like ...

R Yeah.

I ... sitting over a meal or?

R Yeah I also like going on holidays, we explore new places and all but we don't like invent them at all we just like explore them together.

I I think that's a really good answer, the fact that just it's the random things isn't it?

R Do you know if it's only that we will sit down and watch a television programme with them or something together.

I Or even like you were saying earlier before I put on the voice recorder, it's actually sitting at the table that, you shut the door because the kids would be peeking out at the TV.

R Yeah exactly.

I Like meal times.

R Yeah absolutely yeah.  Anything else Aoife you like doing with your family? I can't think.  What about when mammy and daddy stand beside your bed every night, singing I love you at the same time to you.  What I love is when you read me stories.  Yeah.  Are you talking about bedtime or?

I Yeah bedtime.

R Oh yeah I love the stories, and then you are talking about the things that your parents do for you?

I Oh right I didn't make myself properly clear, I'm sorry.  Is there anything I've left out lads, is there anything you feel that I haven't covered about spending time together?

R Halloween.

I Good woman I meant to ask you about Halloween, I love Halloween, go on do you have special family things with Halloween?

R        Yeah we hang an apple from the top of the door and it hangs down to around your mouth height and you have to bite off, whoever gets the biggest bite off from their own apple, they each get individual apples and whoever gets the biggest bite off wins.

I        Wins the apple isn't it?

R        Yeah.

I        Who has the best teeth?

R        We all get like a bucket thing, fill it with water with tonnes of apples in it, so you bob for apples and then we get to keep the apple again.  Yeah we often do barm brack and we put things in it like money, if you get money as I'm told you will be rich, if you get a stick you will beat your wife.  I got the money and the ring.  And if you get the ring you will get married.

I        Excellent.

R        I got the stick.  They all hate it but daddy loves this tradition.  It's potatoes and.  Curly Kale.  But they put loads of coins in it, that's why I like it.  We root out the coins.  We never had that tradition but Donal's mother would have all these traditions, so we didn't know anything about it, we got engaged actually Halloween, Donal put the ring in the barm brack.

I        Oh that was lovely, oh god you would want to be very careful.

R        Yeah so every year I told him now I'm always looking for something shiny like a ring.

I        Oh that's lovely.

R        No I never had that tradition of the colcannon but they had it and they have the money in it.  Did he put the money in the barm brack or the colcannon.  Oh the barm brack.  But he didn't eat a pot of it I remember that night, it's a tradition.  What does that say all along there.  It goes that way.

I        So do you eat most of your meals in the kitchen?

R        Yeah in here.  Except when guests come out there.

I       Oh yeah I saw you've a lovely dining room there.

R       Yeah so we are all together.

I       And do you and Martha actually I must ask you last, do you think the routines of the week are kind of busier than the weekend?

R       Oh without a doubt.  And when we were going trick or treating in Halloween we even got money, me and Oisin because me and my friends went trick or treating. Well the week is really kind of hectic you know.

I       Yeah.

R       Isn't it?  Yeah.  So we try and keep the weekend as, well he does rugby on a Saturday morning and usually a match on Sunday morning, but by lunch time they are finished you know.  Usually I wake up by the time he comes back.   Yeah Mairead is at the age now where she has a lie in.

I       Well you see this is the teenage brain.

R       She wakes me up by pouring water on me.  No I do a song and dance routine. But I don't like it!  Singing in the rain.  (48.00 everyone over speaks here)  And then in the end because you wouldn't get up you know (48:20.1 inaudible).  But when he was small he had this trumpet and he used to play it.  I got it from Santa and every single morning I would wake up with a trumpet.

I       Oh my goodness.

R       No I've a lovely song I sing to them in the morning to wake them up, do you know that one, good morning, good morning.  And if that doesn't work it's singing in the rain with a glass of water.  I want to talk.  (laughter) (48:56.4 inaudible).  And all I did was pour water on your jumper and take off your covers.

I       So is the routine hectic in the morning?

R       Do you know what we are not too bad.

I       Yeah.

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R       Because you know they all have their own alarm clock, so well which used to work but not anymore, I said why don't you set your alarm clock, I said you obviously have that there for decoration because they have discovered their snooze buttons.

I       Oh I love the snooze button.

R       No I just turn it off.  No it's not too bad, I do as much of it the night before as I can you know.  The uniforms are all hanging up, their shoes are there with their bags in the morning and the lunch, anything that is not perishable is in the lunch box do you know.

I       Yeah.

R       So it's not too bad.

I       Yeah I do the same, so I know you could get up at half six or something.

R       Yeah.

I       I don't do that.

R       No I don't either, the morning I'm working now alright I'll have to get up a bit early.

I       Yeah get yourself ready.

R       I just get up to get myself ready.

I       Yeah.

R       But no it's not too bad now.

I       And what about, I think it's that, it depends whether you are a morning person but I'm not so I have to get ready the night before.

R       I'm not a morning person at all.  On Monday we have to get up really early for us.  Yeah.

I       And sorry I keep saying it will be the last thing but what about, did you have your communion this year Oisin?

R      Last year.

I      Last yeah.

R      No the year before last.   The year before sorry.

I      Oh right okay so we have the confirmation coming up.

R      Yeah.  Oh did you know his confirmation and her communion is going to be in the same year in May and my godfather can't come to my confirmation because his twin kids are having their communion on the same day as my confirmation.

I      So there's so much dates in May and June isn't there?

R      That's exactly it yeah, so it is clashing alright this year.

I      So will you do, have you any plans yet we don't?

R      I don't know what, we were going to do a big big have everyone here weren't we and then this happened.  We will have it here,  I hope it's a fine day because the kids will get out.

I      Well look it I think that's, I shall leave you go you have talked so brilliantly and so well so thank you Oisin, thank you very much and your lovely jersey and thank you Aoife.

R      Your welcome.

I      Thank you Martha.

R      You're welcome Katherine.

I      And thank you Mairead.

R      Your.

I      Do you know what I'm recording again, tell me about lent Oisin for a sec?

R      Lent is where you give up something, this year I'm planning to give up.  And what did you give up last year?  Last year I gave up sweets and chocolate and crisps and popcorn.

I       God that's a lot.

R       And this year.  And what happens if you stick to your plan for lent?  And if I stick to my plan for lent we get treated at the end.

I       Well do you know I think it's really good, do you know that you have the discipline like that.

R       Yeah.

I       Well done.

R       And this year I will probably going to give up chocolate and sweets.

I       Well done that's very good.

R       And milk.

I       You mentioned Advent as well, when is Advent?

R       Advent the first day of Advent, and what we do is we open our Advent calendar and the chocolate, but as well we've got a wooden Advent calendar out in the porch and we open one window of it every day and it has a note in it, and sometimes the note says there are chocolate's and all and there's a box of chocolates in it, like a pack of chocolates and stuff and like there's a note like we will go and get the Christmas tree today and there's no fighting.  No fighting.

I       That's really nice isn't it?

R       There is also be really good and make a picture of Santa.  Oh yeah we have to do that tonight, we have to make a picture for Santa now today yeah.

I       That's really lovely, where did you get the calendar do you know?

R       I can't remember but they know, I put in the notes you see and get help from this book I have from the angels, so they tell me what to put into it.

I       Oh right very good.

R       Yeah.

I    And I'm actually looking here at the Dear Santa letter and very politely written, can I please have a DS, make and paint Dora, Babies Day, Art DVD, surprise, Tinkerbelle and the Lost Treasure DVD and also vey politely thank you Santa, lots of love, Aoife Keyes, sorry Oisin say that again.

R    I am getting a ton of stuff for Christmas.  A ton of coal.

I    Oh you got a ton of coal Oisin and you will have to get that put in a lovely frame like your frame of Rome, so thank you very much.